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Selected Cases on the Continuum of First Nations Learning

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SELECTED CASES ON THE CONTINUUM OF FIRST NATIONS LEARNING

(Thesis format: Integrated Article)

by

Julie Peters

Graduate Program in Sociology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Each of the articles in this dissertation addresses a policy or theoretical issue at a different point on the learning continuum. Chapter 2, *First Nations Early Learning and Child Care in Canada*, examines federal policy specific to First Nations early learning and child care (ELCC). This article contributes to our understanding of ELCC by examining the historical role and relationship of the federal government in the financing and delivery of ELCC, outlining the current state of federal early learning policy related to First Nations, and presenting national data on First Nations ELCC to assess how it can inform policy and data needs.

The third chapter, *Standardized Testing and First Nations Schools: A Case Study* examines the impact of the use of provincial standardized testing in an on-reserve elementary school in Ontario. Using a case study approach, the perspectives of the school administration and teachers are explored. The research questions include: 1) Why might a First Nations school choose to implement a regional standardized assessment? 2) How does this impact the schools' ability to provide a culturally based education? 3) What challenges does a First Nations school face in implementing a standardized assessment?

Chapter 4, *Educational Expectations of First Nations Applicants to Postsecondary Education*, utilizes data from a large-scale Canadian survey to look at the relationship between personal, family, community, and academic factors and the educational expectations of First Nations learners. Expectations are a fundamental part of the attainment process, and have been shown to be a key predictor of eventual educational attainment. Most theories of educational expectations, however, have been developed based on the experiences of non-Indigenous youth. The concluding chapter discusses policy implications and future research.

Keywords

Co-Authorship Statement

Parts of Chapters 1 were published in a book chapter with Jerry White as co-author and parts of Chapter 2 were published in a book chapter with Jerry White and Dan Beavon as co-authors. All research, analysis and writing of the parts included in this dissertation were solely the work of Julie Peters.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jerry White for being an outstanding supervisor. Jerry truly cares for his students, and would always go out of his way to ensure I had everything I needed. Thank you for providing me with meaningful learning opportunities. Jerry also has an excellent ability to see the big picture and help piece together the research puzzle. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to work with him.

Thank you to my examining committee, Dr. Tracey Adams, Dr. Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, Dr. Eric Guimond, and Dr. Wolfgang Lehmann, for their careful read of my dissertation and thought-provoking questions.

I would like to say miigwetch to the First Nations Information Governance Centre for the opportunity to write a chapter for the Regional Health Survey Report, and miigwetch to the community, school, and teachers who participated in the standardized testing research. Thank you to Academica Group for allowing me to use the University College Applicant Study data for the expectations research.

To my partner Drew, thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to finish this dissertation. The warm dinners in those last few days of writing were much appreciated. I look forward to having more free time in the evenings to spend with you.

To my Dad, thank you for being my biggest supporter, encourager, and cheerleader throughout this journey, often giving me that push I needed to keep working and "get it done already." To my mom, thank you for showing me the meaning of strength and hard work. I often wonder what you would have thought of all of this, especially given your desire for all of us to go to college and "do something practical." I hope you would have been proud of me in the end, and I feel your spirit around me always.

Thank you to all my family and friends for supporting me along the way. A big thank you to my sister Laurie and her amazing family for feeding me every Sunday and bringing balance to my life. To Jacinda, Damon, Kiera, and Gage, thank you for always reminding me of what is really important in life in a way that only children can.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1

"Knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood" (Battiste, 2002: 15).

1 Introduction

1.1 Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

This dissertation begins by respectfully acknowledging the nations on whose land this dissertation was researched and written: the Attawandaron, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Leni-Lenape.

1.2 Introduction to Study

First Nations peoples in Canada have a fundamental right to education. This is both an inherent human right and a right that is guaranteed in treaties. The education provided to First Nations by the Canadian state, however, has historically been a source of lasting harm (RCAP, 1996). Still today, First Nations education is under-funded and communities struggle to regain full control of their education systems. The Canadian government has recently admitted to and apologized for past wrong doing, yet social justice in education has not yet materialized for First Nations. Nevertheless, Indigenous scholars and political leaders maintain that education is a key means of enabling a good life, and is central to self-determination (AFN, 2005; Battiste, 2005; Battiste and McLean, 2005; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache, 2000; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Stonechild, 2006).

Despite the large historical and cultural diversity among First Nations, most share a common understanding of education and learning as a holistic, lifelong process (Battiste, 2005).[1] Learning, from a First Nations perspective, involves both formal and informal

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[1] This brief introduction cannot do justice do the breadth and complexity of Indigenous theories of learning and education. See Battiste (2002), Cajete (1994), and Debassige (2012) for a more detailed overview.

opportunities and is fundamentally connected to land, language, spirit, and culture. Battiste (2002:14-15) has stated:

> *Learning is viewed as a life-long responsibility that people assume to understand the world around them and to animate their personal abilities. Knowledge teaches people how to be responsible for their own lives, develops their sense of relationship to others, and helps them model competent and respectful behaviour. Traditions, ceremonies, and daily observations are all integral parts of the learning process. They are spirit-connecting processes that enable the gifts, visions, and spirits to emerge in each person.*

As this quote from Battiste illustrates, at its core learning is a process of coming to know how to live in the world through participation and relationships; relationships not only with other people and communities, but with all of nature (Cajete, 1994). All things, both animate and inanimate, are respected and understood as having teachings to share. First-hand experience, including observing, listening, and acting within the natural environment, is highly valued as a mode of learning (Ireland, 2009).

Individuals are all said to have a "learning spirit", which is conceptualized as "an entity that emerges from the complex interrelationships between the learner and his or her learning journey" (CCL, 2007: 7). This spirit is continually shifting and changing, evolving as the learner comes to know their gifts and capacities. It is said that when this spirit is missing, learning can be difficult and unfulfilling (CCL, 2007).

As a holistic process, learning is also intricately intertwined with well-being, which is understood to mean the total health of the total person within the total environment (Dumont, 2005). These linkages have been well-documented in the literature. For example, it has been shown that learning traditional language and culture contributes to well-being by promoting a positive self-identity and by enabling greater access to traditional healing ceremonies (McIvor et al, 2009), and that cultural continuity, a measure of the intergenerational transmission of culture, acts as a protective factor against suicide for youth (Chandler and Lalonde, 1998). With regard to formal education, individuals with higher levels of educational attainment tend to have greater job security,

better access to healthy environments, more social supports, higher income, and are better able to decipher and utilize health information, all contributing to higher well-being (Cummins et al, 1999; Reading and Wien, 2009; Richmond et al, 2007).

Much previous research on First Nations learning and education, however, has focused narrowly on formal educational attainment and has too often been conducted from a deficit perspective. Existing studies have tended to utilize Eurocentric theories of education, focusing on comparisons between First Nations peoples and the general Canadian population. For example, a prominent framework used in the 1960s and 1970s to explain relatively low educational attainment among Indigenous, ethnic minority, and poor children was cultural deprivation theory (Das, 1971; Lipton, 1962). According to Das (1971), cultural deprivation refers to "a complex set of conditions which favours intellectual subnormality in a child" (Das, 1971: 82). These "conditions" were generally the quality of the home environment, or, more specifically, the cultural values and knowledge that are transmitted (and not transmitted) to children in ethnic minority or poor families. Thus, blame was placed squarely on Indigenous families for having cultural values and practices that predisposed them to educational failure, and the solution advocated was for compensatory education designed to infuse Indigenous children with the dominant culture (Gray and Beresford, 2008). Studies such as these neglected First Nations' beliefs about education and learning, overlooked the strengths of First Nations peoples and knowledges, and ignored the varied sources and kinds of learning that are important to First Nations. Research studies focused on First Nations education also often failed to address the historical, political, and social contexts that impact the learning experiences of First Nations peoples.

Fortunately, a great deal of work has been done by First Nations and allied scholars and community members to reframe the conversation around First Nations education and learning (Battiste, 2002; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache, 2000; CCL, 2007; CCL, 2009; Debassige, 2012; Ireland, 2009; Stonechild, 2006). Notably, the Canadian Council on Learning's Aboriginal Knowledge Learning Center, led by Marie Battiste, has shifted the

focus away from learning deficits and refocused attention on the learning spirit (CCL, 2009).

Before proceeding further with this dissertation, it is customary to introduce myself personally and situate myself within the research. This is followed by a brief policy history of First Nations education, which is vital to setting the context for this study; as Hampton (1995) has stated, Indigenous education "cannot be understood apart from a historical analysis" (p. 15). Recent demographic and learning data are then presented, before an outline of the dissertation is provided along with the key research questions that this work sought to address.

1.3   Personal Location

Locating oneself has been shown to be an important element of Indigenous research (Absolon and Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2001). Absolon and Willet (2005) state that "identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the research emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality" (p. 97). It also allows the reader to better understand and assess the research (Absolon and Willett, 2005).

My name is Julie Peters. I am a White woman of European heritage who was raised by Ken and Linda Peters on a farm in a rural area of what is now known as Southwestern Ontario. My grandparents all arrived in Canada shortly after World War II from the Netherlands; we are settlers in Canada. After hearing of my Dutch roots, First Nations colleagues have joked that this explains my relationships with First Nations, referring to the *Kaswentha* (Two Row Wampum Treaty) that was formed by the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in 1613. The *Kaswentha* belt has two parallel rows of purple beads that are said to symbolize the two nations of people travelling down a river in separate vessels, side by side but not interfering with the other. Between the two purple rows are three rows of white beads, said to symbolize peace, friendship, and respect (King, 2007; McGregor, 2008; Two Row Wampum, 1995). As explained in the publication *Akwesasne Notes* (Two Row Wampum, 1995), "The Two Row Wampum is a treaty of respect for the

dignity and integrity of the other culture and stresses the importance of non-interference of one nation in the business of the other, unless invited." Even in its 400th year anniversary, the *Kaswentha* remains relevant to settler/Indigenous relations, and to my own approach to research and community work.

While I grew up just twenty minutes from Ipperwash Provincial Park and witnessed many instances of racism in my small town high school, I did not become politicized to First Nations rights until university. In the last year of my undergraduate education I was talking with my faculty supervisor about potential topics for my honours thesis. I had a notion of wanting to research and write about feminist theory, but was having difficulty formulating a research question. At some point during our meeting, my supervisor showed me two news articles that had been published in a Canadian newspaper. The first headline mentioned a young mother who had been found murdered in a hotel room while the second, which had been published a few days later after the identity of the woman had been released, had a headline bluntly stating that a "Native prostitute" was found dead. The difference in tone between the two articles was astounding. It was clear that in the eyes of the media, the life lost clearly held more value before the woman's ethnic identity and line of work were revealed. This encounter provided the impetus for my undergraduate thesis on missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada.

As the thesis was nearing completion, I was invited to present my research at a conference being organized by the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre on campus. I was extremely nervous at the prospect of sharing my work as this was to be my first conference presentation, and also because I would be speaking to a primarily Indigenous audience. I felt my outsider status acutely and worried that I would be perceived to be contributing to the problem of Indigenous communities being "researched to death" (Castellano, 2004).

Thankfully, the conference environment was welcoming and inspiring. After the session ended a woman approached to tell me the story of her sister who had gone missing, and the experience her family had with the police and trying to draw attention to the case. Her story was further confirmation of the apathy surrounding these cases and the lack of

knowledge and understanding among much of the Canadian population, and it entrenched my desire to *do something*. This led to volunteering in various capacities in the Indigenous community in London. The insight and knowledge gained in these contexts was and is important to my learning journey and I am thankful for all the people I have encountered along the way. The desire to "do something" also involved continuing to focus on First Nations contexts within my research.

Nonetheless, the nervousness and self-doubt I felt before attending that conference have never fully gone away. It has ebbed and flowed, but is always present. I continue to struggle with whether or not I should be conducting this research. As a woman of European heritage who experiences privilege daily, I have not had the lived experience to ground this work. Part of this experience for me, as a non-Indigenous person doing Indigenous research, has been about how to act as an ally, to situate my research as furthering respect and understanding, and finding the pieces that felt possible/suitable. There are also a few quotes that I have found encouraging: Latin American Jewish feminist Judit Moschkovich (1981: 79) wrote "it is not the duty of the oppressed to educate the oppressor"; Plains Cree Métis scholar Emma LaRocque (1993: 76) has written, "The onus for change cannot rest solely on Aboriginal shoulders. White people in positions of power must share the burdens of finding answers, as they have been part of the problem"; and from Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano (2000: 23),

> *For non-Aboriginal people the challenge is to open up space for Aboriginal initiatives in schools and colleges, work sites, and organizations so that Indigenous ways of knowing can flourish and intercultural sharing can be practiced in a spirit of coexistence and mutual respect.*

Thankfully, the times of greatest insecurity have also been followed by experiences, conversations, or readings that reignited my passion.

1.4   A Brief History of First Nations Education

First Nations have long had their own modes of education. These have not been static, but evolved, shifted, and changed over time. While each nation has its own education

methods, common practices across nations have included ceremonies, oral histories, teaching stories, learning games, apprenticeships, formal instruction, and tag-along teaching (Buffalohead, 1976 as cited in Hampton, 1995). Traditionally, the teachers were the community members, and each adult had a responsibility to each child to ensure they knew how to live a good life. It was a process that "provided the young with the specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within the context of a spiritual worldview" (Kirkness and Selkirk Bowman, 1992: 7). Indigenous modes of education were disrupted by the arrival of Europeans, as will be shown over the following pages, but it is important to remember that Indigenous knowledge and methods of teaching and learning have continued and are being revitalized. The purpose of this history is not to privilege Eurocentric education, but to provide the historical context for the current state of First Nations education.

1.4.1 European Contact

The first known European educational institutions for Indigenous youth were established near Quebec by the Recollets in 1620. The French policy on Indigenous education at the time has been referred to as '[f]rancization', which was based on the Recollets' belief that Indigenous peoples needed to be turned into 'Frenchmen' before they could be converted to Christianity (Jaenen, 1986). A thoroughly French education was thus required. To this end, the Recollets would single out Indigenous boys for schooling, educating them at the seminary or sending them to France where they could be fully immersed in French culture and language. It was assumed that these students would then return to their communities and form an Indigenous elite that could assist in Christianizing the rest of the population (Jaenen, 1986). However, the Recollets were largely unsuccessful. They were never able to attract large numbers of students to their seminary or to France, due largely to parents being unwilling to part with their children for extended periods of time. In 1629 the English captured Quebec, and the Recollets along with the Jesuits, who had arrived in New France by this time, were forced to leave the colony. When Quebec was returned to France in 1632, it was the Jesuits who were given a monopoly over missionary activity (Magnuson, 1992).

The Jesuits initially adopted quite a different approach to the education of Indigenous peoples than that taken by the Recollets. Rather than instructing only a few students in separate, thoroughly French educational institutions, the Jesuits focused on delivering education within Indigenous villages and in Indigenous languages. The focus of instruction was on Christian doctrine rather than on French language and customs. However, by mid-1630 the missionaries began to feel that the greatest impediment to the Christianization of the Indigenous peoples was the nomadic lifestyle of the nations they were attempting to Christianize. Thus, the Jesuits concluded that rendering the Indigenous peoples sedentary was an important step in conversion to Christianity. A plan was devised that involved establishing permanent settlements for the Indigenous nations near French settlements, where the missionaries could be in constant contact with the tribes and the Indigenous peoples could become accustomed with the French language and way of life. The first reserve, the Sillery habitation, was established in 1637 near Quebec (Magnuson, 1992). While these early "reserves" did not have formal schools, missionaries would conduct instruction in various places around the settlements. In addition to Christian training, education was largely of a practical nature, focusing on teaching the Indigenous peoples agricultural practices with the goal of transforming them into self-sufficient farmers.

While the attached settlements were somewhat successful in winning Christian converts, they experienced less success in encouraging Indigenous people to take on a French way of life. The reserves were also plagued by disease and social and economic problems. Thus, despite initial success, most of the reserves experienced sharp population decline leading many, like the Sillery reserve, to fade into non-existence (Magnuson, 1992). By this time, the Jesuits had already begun to shift their emphasis, focusing on residential or boarding schools in French towns as the primary means of delivering education to the Indigenous population (Jaenen, 1986).

Residential schools were seen by the French as an attractive option for educating Indigenous youth, as the children could be removed from the influence of their parents and fully acculturated into the French way of life. Attracting and retaining students to

attend residential institutions, however, proved to be a difficult task. Parents were often apprehensive about allowing their children to live among the French, and children who were sent to attend residential institutions would often run away. The schools were also expensive to run, as the communities and parents who offered their children to the Jesuits for instruction expected gifts and continued material assistance for doing so, and the children attending the institutions needed to be housed and fed (Jaenen, 1986). For these reasons, day schools were also in operation, with the day school pupils always outnumbering those in residential institutions.

French teaching and instruction styles, which involved treating the students like adults, using strict discipline, fostering competitiveness, and emphasizing recitations and examinations, were largely incompatible with the traditional education of Indigenous students. Students resisted and refused to cooperate, and the French found that those who were successfully educated and Christianized were ineffective at preaching the word to their people (Miller, 1996). One Ursuline sister, Mother Marie de l'Incarnation commented that "out of a hundred that have passed through our hands scarcely have we civilized one" (as quoted in Jaenen, 1986: 58).

Around 1668, after the elevation of New France to a Royal Colony, there was renewed pressure from the French government to use boarding institutions to educate and ultimately assimilate Indigenous youth. The French administration saw the conversion of Indigenous peoples into Frenchmen as a means of securing and populating their colony in the New World without depopulating Old France. Seen to be failing in this regard, the Jesuits were accused by the Crown of not working effectively towards teaching French customs and language. However, what the French administration did not realize was that the Jesuits had attempted to convert the Indigenous peoples to French ways, but had found this approach wanting. The Ursulines, brought to New France to educate Indigenous girls, supported the Jesuits stating that acculturation had not been successful due to the 'tenacity of the Indigenous culture' (Magnuson, 1992: 61). In addition to the difficulty of 'Frenchifying' the Indigenous peoples, it began to be clear that assimilation made little sense for the fur traders and the military who found the Indigenous peoples to

be essential to the fur trade and strong military allies just as they were. Thus, in 1685 the governor of New France stated that the policy of Frenchification was not working and called on the Crown to alter their policy. By the end of the century, assimilative residential schools for educating Indigenous youth had been largely abandoned by the French and few Indigenous children were attending French schools (Miller, 1996).

1.4.2   Pre-Confederation in British North America

Prior to the War of 1812, the British were not concerned with assimilating Indigenous peoples as their knowledge and skills were useful to the British in their roles as military allies and as essential partners in the fur trade. Maintaining these partnerships was of the utmost concern. After the War of 1812, however, with hostilities subsiding and the fur trade on the decline, the Indigenous population began to be seen as an impediment to European settlement. It was at this time that there began to be a shift in focus from maintaining Indigenous peoples as allies, to, in the words of a former secretary of state for the colonies, "reclaiming the Indians from a state of barbarism and introducing amongst them the industrious and peaceful habits of civilized life" (as quoted in Wilson, 1986: 66).

Reflecting this shift in thinking, responsibility for Indigenous peoples was formally transferred from military to civilian authorities in 1830. Civilian authorities quickly adopted a new policy that was based on 'civilizing' the Indigenous peoples through education. While there had been educational institutions established in British North America prior to this change in policy, these institutions were run entirely by church organizations without assistance from the Crown (Chalmers, 1972). After 1830, however, the colonial government began to take an express interest in the establishment and operation of schools for Indigenous peoples and numerous new schools were opened. The operation of the schools was largely left in the hands of missionary organizations, and the costs for building and running schools was shared between the colonial government, missionary groups and the Indigenous peoples themselves (Nock, 1988).

As part of the new policy of civilizing and assimilating the Indigenous population, efforts were first made to establish reserve lands on which the Indigenous peoples could settle. Similar to earlier attempts by the French, the hope was that the Indigenous peoples would abandon nomadic lifestyles and become sedentary farmers, adopting a European way of life. Schools were established on the reserves to provide rudimentary education and Christian teachings. The reserves proved to be a failure, however, after a number of the first experiments were unable to retain a sizable Indigenous population (Miller, 1996).

By the mid-1840's, realizing that the traditional livelihood of Indigenous peoples had been eroded due to the rapid expansion of British settlement, the government shifted its focus to manual labour schools, as recommended by the Bagot Commission in 1844. In addition to Christian training, these schools were to teach Indigenous peoples practical skills that could help them to survive in the White man's world while promoting assimilation. According to Captain Anderson, a superintendent of Indian Affairs, by attending manual labour schools Indigenous children were to "forget their Indian habits, and be instructed in all the necessary arts of civilized life, and become one with [their] White brethren" (as quoted in Wilson, 1986: 72). Boys would be taught trades such as carpentry, shoemaking and blacksmithing, while the girls would learn domestic skills such as sewing and knitting. That the proposed industrial schools were to be large and centrally located was seen to have the added advantage of removing students from the influence of their families.

In 1846 the colonial administration met with various chiefs in Orillia to persuade them to accept the government's plans to establish manual labour schools for the education of Indigenous children and to settle larger, permanent areas around the schools. The Indigenous bands were to put one fourth of the annuities they received from the government towards supporting the educational institutions. Despite some objections to their relocation into concentrated settlements and to the Christian nature of the schools, the assembled chiefs ultimately gave their support to the proposed plan. Many of the supporters, however, hoped that the schools would eventually be run by their own people (Miller, 1996).

While numerous manual labour schools were opened in the decades following the commission, they quickly lost the support of the Indigenous peoples. An 1856 Special Commissioner's report on Indian Affairs found that authorities were having difficulty persuading Ojibwe parents to send their children to manual labour schools on the Sarnia reserve, and less than half of the potential school population was attending school on the Six Nations reserve on the Grand River. The report came to the conclusion that "this benevolent experiment has been to a great extent a failure", and the focus began to shift to day schools (as quoted in Miller, 1996).

1.4.3   Confederation to World War II

Under the British North American Act of 1867, all aspects of Indigenous affairs became the responsibility of the Canadian federal government. This included education, which had been promised in the various treaties signed between Indigenous nations and the Crown. While the treaties generally promised day schools on reserves, problems with attendance and the perception that day schools were ineffective in assimilating Indigenous peoples led to a search for alternatives (Miller, 1996). After the establishment of the Indian Act in 1876, MP Nicholas Flood Davin was assigned the task of investigating the United States' use of residential schools for educating American Indians to see whether this would be a suitable model for Canada. In his 1879 report, Davin recommended that similar institutions be established in Western Canada (Haig-Brown, 1988). Although the federal government was responsible for Indigenous education, the administration of the schools was to be delegated to the various church missions that were already engaged in the venture. Thus, unlike provincial schools at the time, schools for Indigenous children were to be denominational and wherever possible existing mission schools were to be used. While Davin also recommended that the schools both employ and teach Métis peoples, who he saw as the "natural mediator between the Government and the red man", the government insisted that it would only provide funds for the education of Status Indians and there are no records of attempts to recruit Métis staff (Miller, 1996: 101).

Similar to the earlier experiences with manual labour schools and with boarding institutions in New France, recruitment and retention of Indigenous children at the residential schools became a key issue. In 1893 the government, looking to cut costs, instituted a per capita school funding system that shifted more of the financial burden for schooling onto missionary organizations and students. Maintaining maximum enrollment became of utmost concern for missionary groups, while at the same time inadequate financial resources led to poorer school conditions which made the residential institutions less attractive to Indigenous families. In order to counter declining enrolments and ensure steadier funding, missionary groups pressured the government to make school attendance mandatory. Heeding their concerns, the Indian Act was amended in 1894 to make school attendance at a day, boarding, or industrial school compulsory for ten months of the year for all Indigenous children over age six (Grant, 1996).

By the turn of the century, serious concerns were being raised about the health and safety of students attending the schools. Diseases such as tuberculosis ran rampant and mortality rates were alarmingly high. A 1907 report from the department's chief medical officer stated that the death rate due to tuberculosis among Indigenous students in the West was 24% and Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, conceded that about half of the children who attended boarding institutions did not live to benefit from the education they received (Miller, 1996: 133). For those students who did survive their years in boarding establishments, the education they received was minimal at best. The schooling often focused more on religious indoctrination and manual labour than on academic knowledge. When students left the schools they were ill-equipped to compete for jobs in the 'White man's world', and were alienated from their own communities (Chalmers, 1972).

In 1910, concerned with the high costs associated with educating Indigenous youth and the failure of educational institutions to transform students into successful members of the dominant society, the government again shifted its educational policy. Abandoning the prior focus on preparing Indigenous students for life in White society, the new objective was to prepare students for life on the reserve, marking a policy shift from

integration to segregation (Miller, 1996). The curriculum, already far less advanced than that of provincial schools, was simplified further and any new facilities built were to be basic day schools which could offer education to Indigenous youth at a far lower cost to the government (Barman et al, 1986). In the 1920s, the Industrial school model was completely abandoned and all former industrial and boarding establishments came to be known as residential schools (Miller, 1996).

The education received in both residential and day schools in the early- to mid- twentieth century was minimal and basic. The teachers usually did not hold a teaching certificate and the principals were normally clergymen who had little experience with developing instructional programs (Chalmers, 1972). With regard to residential schools specifically, a half-day system was typically followed in which students were to receive classroom instruction for half of the day and learn practical skills, usually agricultural, for the remainder of the day. In addition to ensuring that Indigenous pupils received only a very basic scholastic education, this system allowed the administration to extract free labour from students by having them perform chores around the schools as part of their 'practical instruction'. In fact, officials at the time had expressed hope that residential schools might become financially independent through the manual labour of their students (Miller, 1996: 157). Needless to say, few students progressed past the primary grades regardless of how many years were spent in school. In 1930 only 3% of Indigenous students had progressed past grade 6 and three-quarters of all those in school were in grades 1 to 3. In comparison, about one third of students were beyond grade 6 in the provincial school system at the time (Barman et al, 1986).

Aware of the dismal academic results, various Indigenous individuals, leaders and groups brought their concerns to the government. For example, a parent of a student at Battleford residential school refused to send his child back, telling the Indian agent that his son could not read, speak or write English after five years of attendance, his time having been spent performing farm labour rather than learning (Miller, 1996). In 1911, a delegation from Saskatchewan to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs requested that less emphasis be placed on farming, and more on class work (Barman et al, 1986). Two decades later,

the League of Indians of Western Canada passed a resolution asking that the Department of Indian Affairs develop local day schools on reserve since students in residential schools were progressing so slowly (Sluman and Goodwill, 1982). The next year the League pushed the department to require that teachers have proper certification and that students in residential schools spend more time in the classroom (Barman et al, 1986). Little was done to respond to these requests.

As would later become more widely known, not only did little academic learning occur in residential schools, for many First Nations students residential schools were places of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Children were taken, often forcefully, from their homes, had their hair cut, were clothed in European style of dress, and were placed in unsanitary living conditions. Students were taught to be ashamed of their culture and to see themselves and their people as inferior and immoral, often facing punishment if they spoke their native language (Miller, 1996). Physical abuse was also common place in residential schools, and it is clear from government documents from the time that church and department officials were aware of the abuse and chose not to put a stop to it. For example, in the early 1900s, an inspector of Indian Agencies named W. Graham brought numerous cases of abuse to the attention of the Department of Indian Affairs. One such case involved a principal at Crowstand School who had tied ropes to the arms of a number of boys who had attempted to run away, making them run behind the buggy for eight miles. In another case, a boy from the Anglican Old Sun's School who had run away was shackled to a bed, stripped and beaten mercilessly. In all of the cases brought forward by Graham, the Department refused to heed Graham's requests to have the offenders removed from the schools, siding instead with the churches which defended the actions of their employees (Milloy, 1999). Despite numerous suggestions that regulations on the acceptable use and limits of punishment should be sent to school principals, no such regulations were ever issued. Principals and school staff thus disciplined children as they saw fit, with records showing that students experienced a litany of abuses including chaining and shackling, being locked in small, dark spaces, having their heads shaved, and being severely beaten with whips and fists (Milloy, 1999).

While almost entirely absent from government documents of the time, reflecting the general lack of discussion of sexual matters in that period more generally, it is now widely known that sexual abuse was also pervasive. According to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, while residential school students had long spoken about their negative experiences, it was a B.C. social worker working with clients from the Nl'akapxm First Nation in 1987 that acted as a catalyst in bringing to light the full extent of the abuses endured by former students. Examining the personal disclosures of Nl'akapxm clients, she discovered that most of the Nl'akapxm who had attended St. George's Residential School had been sexually abused during their time there. A criminal investigation followed and a former dormitory supervisor was convicted of sexual assault, drawing media attention to the issue and setting the stage for other former students to bring charges forward (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005). Former students of St. George's Residential School also brought a lawsuit against the Anglican Church and the Canadian Government, becoming the first such civil case to come to trial in Canada. By 1999, 2500 lawsuits had been launched over abuse at residential schools (Miller, 2000). While it is not known exactly how many students experienced sexual abuse, one study estimated that 48% to 70% of residential school students in one First Nations community were sexually abused (Chrisjohn and Belleau, 1991).[2]

1.4.4   1940s to 1960s

It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that the government began to once again rethink its education policy. Funding cutbacks during the First World War, the Depression, and the Second World War had left federal schools severely under-resourced. At the same time, the atrocities of the Second World War brought an increased awareness of institutionalized racism and human rights issues to the general public, drawing attention to the treatment of Indigenous peoples. Impetus for change was also provided by the

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[2] For more information on abuse in residential schools see Knockwood (1992); Haig-Brown (1988) and Miller (1996).

large number of Indigenous men returning from war who were increasingly unwilling to accept inferior treatment after fighting for their country (Miller, 2000).

In 1946 a Special Joint Commission of the Senate and House of Commons was formed to examine and formulate suggestions for how to improve the Indian Act. With regard to education, the committee noted that residential schools were failing to both educate and assimilate Aboriginal children and should thus be abandoned. It was proposed that where possible, Indigenous students should be integrated into provincial schools (Bear Nicholas, 2001). Based on these suggestions, the revised Indian Act of 1951 included provisions for the federal government to strike tuition agreements with provincial and territorial authorities for Aboriginal students to be educated in provincial schools. By the year 1960, about one quarter of Aboriginal students were attending provincial institutions (Barman et al, 1986). Among the first generation of students to attend public schools, however, dropout rates were alarmingly high with approximately 94% of Aboriginal students leaving school before graduating grade 12, compared to 12% of non-Aboriginal students (Canada Indian Affairs Branch, 1967).

Despite the Commission's clear proposal to abandon residential schools in 1946, strong resistance from the churches, and in some cases from Aboriginal communities themselves, lengthened the process of winding down the school system. By 1960, over 60 residential schools remained in operation (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2007). Over the next decade, however, a number of factors combined to produce more rapid change. For one, the government formally ended its partnership with the churches in 1969, effectively secularizing Aboriginal education and stifling a key source of opposition (RCAP, 1996). In terms of public attitudes, the civil rights movement in the United States and decolonization struggles in Asia and Africa were bringing attention to equal rights for minority groups and made addressing the issue of Aboriginal well-being a moral imperative (Miller, 1996). Further, various government reports were commissioned during this time to investigate the needs of the Aboriginal population, with two such reports explicitly condemning residential schools. Both released in 1967, Caldwell's *Indian Residential Schools* and Hawthorn's *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of*

Canada, commonly known as the Hawthorn Report, provided strong criticisms of the residential school system and supported the government's policy of integrating students into provincial schools. Both recommended that the government cease to operate residential schools and Hawthorn suggested that the former residential establishments be converted to hostels where children could board to attend regular schools. Rather than disputing the criticisms of the federal school system, the government endorsed the reports and used them to support their position on integration (Milloy, 1999).

1.4.5   Education in the North

The development of European-style education in the North[3] occurred at a different pace and time than elsewhere in Canada, but followed largely the same overall pattern. From 1670 to 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) controlled large swaths of land in the North and West due to a royal charter granted to the company by King Charles II. Interested solely in trade, HBC initially discouraged missionary activity on its land and had no desire to educate or assimilate the Indigenous population (Carney, 1995). After these lands, known as the North-Western Territory and Rupert's Land, were ceded to the newly formed Dominion of Canada in 1870, missionaries began to have a larger presence in the North and expanded on the few mission schools that had been opened in the 1860's (Macpherson, 1991b). However, like the Hudson's Bay Company, the Canadian government had little interest in educating the Northern Indigenous population, as it was assumed that having a formal education was futile for peoples living in such isolated regions. The Canadian government also hoped that Northern Indigenous peoples would maintain their traditional lifestyles and thus not rely on the government for assistance (Milloy, 1999).

With little involvement from the Canadian government, education was left in the hands of the religious groups that operated missions in the North, primarily the Anglican and Catholic Churches. A number of day and residential facilities were slowly established

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[3] 'The North' is being used here to refer to the area encompassing present day Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Northern Quebec.

and, after repeated appeals to the federal government for assistance, limited funding began to be provided in the 1890s (Coates, 1991; Macpherson, 1991b). The government was not convinced, however, that education in the North was necessary or desirable and remained generally disinterested in Northern educational activities (Bonesteel, 2006). Unwilling to establish a territory-wide education system, new schools were opened only when missionaries pressured the government to provide funds, and, even then, funding was provided reluctantly (Coates, 1991). Reflecting the government's sentiment, Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, granted the capital and operating costs for a new boarding school in the Yukon in 1909 but stated, "I will not undertake in a general way to educate the Indians of the Yukon. In my judgment they can, if left as Indians, earn a better living" (as quoted in Coates, 1991: p. 138). Due to the lack of government support and the meager funds available, the schools that were established were marked by inadequate facilities, unqualified teachers, a lack of supplies and curriculum, and they operated intermittently, closing and opening based on the availability of teachers and funds and on the migratory patterns of the Indigenous populations (Coates, 1986; Macpherson, 1991b).

It was not until after World War II that the federal government began to become truly involved in the education of Northern Aboriginal peoples. In the post-war period, a renewed interest in issues of social justice and the well-being of disadvantaged Canadians, as well as a concern for Arctic sovereignty, brought a flurry of new programs to the North designed to improve everything from health, to housing, to employment (Bonesteel, 2006). Education also became a concern, and a number of reports were commissioned to investigate the current state of affairs and what should be done. In 1955 it was arranged that the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources would take on responsibility for educating children in the Northwest Territories, and in 1956 all mission school teachers were made federal employees. In 1955 an aggressive school construction program was also announced to expand the meager education system. Many of the new schools were accompanied by hostels to house students from outlying areas and, in line with the federal government's wider push towards integrated schooling, the schools were to educate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Macpherson, 1991b). According Gordon Robertson, Deputy Minister of the Department of Northern

Affairs in the 1950's, the number of schools in the Northwest Territories grew rapidly from only 18 in the entire territory in 1953 to 30 schools in the Mackenzie Educational District and 25 in the Arctic Educational District in 1962 (Macpherson, 1991b).

The move towards federal control also brought a dramatic shift in the curriculum being offered in Northern schools. Under federal authority, school programming began to more closely resemble the curriculum in southern schools and English or French were the only languages of instruction (Coates, 1991; Milloy, 1999). While the Department of Northern Affairs, professing to have learned from the mistakes of the southern school system, stated that their educational policy was to 'maintain the native way of life' and 'preserve the pride of the race', critics asserted that inside the classroom assimilation remained the primary goal (Milloy, 1999).

By the late 1960's, jurisdiction over Northern education was once again changing hands. The creation of a new government in the Northwest Territories with Yellowknife as its capital led to the devolution of a number of federal powers in 1967. Education was devolved soon after, and by 1970 the Northwest Territories government had full jurisdiction over education (Macpherson, 1991b). In the Yukon, virtually all of the schools were under the authority of the Yukon territorial government by the late 1960s (Coates, 1991). Arctic Quebec followed a similar pattern, with provincial schools being established in most communities in the 1960s. The Quebec government, seeking to assert control over Inuit affairs, offered an alternative education system to the pre-existing federal system but both federal and provincial schools continued to operate (Vick-Westgate, 2002).

1.4.6   Indian Control of Indian Education

A watershed moment in Indigenous education across the country occurred in 1969 with the release of the 'White Paper' and the subsequent Indigenous response. Produced by Trudeau's Liberal government, the White Paper argued that in order for the conditions of Indigenous peoples to be improved they needed to be made full and equal citizens in Canadian society. To achieve 'full equality' the Indian Act was to be repealed, the

Department of Indian Affairs eliminated, and all special legal status for Indigenous peoples was to be removed. Indigenous peoples were to become just one more element in a multicultural society.

First Nations reacted swiftly to the proposed policy, condemning the paper as an attempt by the government to shirk its responsibility to First Nations. Soon after, various Indigenous organizations began producing position papers voicing their intense opposition to the terms of the White paper, with education becoming a key concern. One of the most significant of these position papers was the National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 paper titled *Indian Control of Indian Education.* At this time, the government had already abandoned the White Paper due to the strong and united Aboriginal opposition and had promised to consult with First Nations groups in the formulation of a new policy. The National Indian Brotherhood's paper was a comprehensive statement of the need for local control of Aboriginal education, inspired in part by events such as the 1970 Blue Quills Residential School sit-in, in which the community successfully resisted the school's closure, demanding it remain open under community control. The government, already committed to phasing out the failed and costly residential schools and finding that integration was not more academically or socially successful, acquiesced and accepted the Brotherhood's position paper in principle (Longboat, 1986).

After accepting *Indian Control of Indian Education* as the national policy statement on Aboriginal education, the government began to devolve some administrative control of schools to First Nations communities. In most cases, the devolution of responsibility to First Nations communities resulted in very little actual control over the content and delivery of education. More comprehensive change came about in Northern Quebec due to the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975), which was the first major land claim settlement in Canada. The agreement contained detailed provisions on education, including the creation of a Cree and an Inuit school board. The two school boards were given the power to develop and deliver culturally-appropriate curriculum and to use Cree and Inuktitut as the languages of instruction (Vick-Westgate, 2002).

Overall, however, there were many misunderstandings and struggles over the meaning and implementation of Indian control. Frustrated with the pace and direction of change, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) produced *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of the Future* in 1988, which was a rearticulation of the ideas in *Indian Control of Indian Education.* However, more than just updating and revising the original policy statement, *Tradition and Education* reflected a clear shift in thinking among First Nations leaders about the meaning of Indian control. While *Indian Control of Indian Education* spoke about control in terms of devolving responsibility for education to bands that would have authority over education similar to that of provincial school boards, *Tradition and Education* emphasized Aboriginal peoples' inherent right to self-government as the basis for control over education (Abele et al, 2000). It was argued that a Constitutional amendment was needed to formally recognize and affirm this inherent right, or, at the very least, federal legislation that would ensure future dealings between First Nations and the federal government were on a government-to-government basis.

To aid in the transition process, *Tradition and Education* demanded that the government provide the funding necessary to create a new administrative structure, establish national and regional educational institutions, formulate long-term education plans, research First Nations learning styles and to develop new curriculum. Monetary issues were central to the report, as it was argued that funding was a key barrier to First Nations jurisdiction over education. For First Nations to truly take control of their education systems funding would need to be adequate and sustainable and First Nations would need to have full and complete control over the allocation and management of resources (AFN, 1988).

The government responded to *Tradition and Education* by commissioning James MacPherson to review the document. His findings were published in the *MacPherson Report on Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future* in 1991. MacPherson reported that the federal government's Aboriginal education policy was extremely skeletal and unclear. Echoing the AFN proposal, it was recommended that a constitutional amendment be made to provide a strong foundation for First Nations jurisdiction over education. MacPherson further recommended that the government

implement a National Indian Education Law that would specify the role of First Nations in developing education policy, affirming their jurisdiction and control. The law would also include provisions for the establishment of a national advisory committee and a national Indian education institute that would aid in the transition to First Nations control and contribute to the development of national education policies (MacPherson, 1991a).

While MacPherson generally supported the AFN proposals, Abele, Dittburner and Graham (2000) noted that the two documents differed in their understanding of the meaning of self-government. Seeking to assure the federal government and the public that self-government was not a 'scary concept', MacPherson stated in the report that it should not be thought of in terms of self-determination:

> *We should not allow our pre-occupation with the place of Quebec in Canada or our political and legal thinking rooted in the concept and definition of federalism, to lead us to the facile, but wrong, conclusion that self-government means independence or self-determination (MacPherson, 1991a: 42).*

This could be understood as in contrast to the AFN assertion in *Tradition and Education* that self-determination is central to their call for jurisdiction over education:

> *The recognition and reflection of the inherent right to be and to remain distinct First Nations and to exercise local self-determination over local education programs through self-government is at the heart of this Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education (AFN, 1988: 38).*

Further, MacPherson did not use the term 'inherent right' at all in his report. Nevertheless, *Tradition and Education* and the subsequent *MacPherson Report* brought First Nations education back to the national arena.

It could be argued that the federal government attempted to respond to the recommendations of MacPherson and the AFN by including a constitutional amendment recognizing First Nations' "inherent right of self-government within Canada" in the 1992 Charlottetown Accord. However, the Accord was defeated that same year. Rather than re-

opening constitutional debates, the federal government in 1995 introduced a new policy known as the Aboriginal Self-Government Policy, which officially recognized Aboriginal peoples' inherent right of self-government under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and established the willingness of the federal government to enter into self-government negotiations with First Nations.[4] This policy statement did not attempt to delineate uniform terms for Aboriginal self-government, but rather proposed that self-government agreements be negotiated that are tailored to the needs of each First Nation. The broad guidelines structuring these agreements were that Aboriginal jurisdiction could apply to matters that are internal to their communities, integral to their distinct identities, and essential to their operation as a government. Education is explicitly listed as an area for negotiation.

While self-government agreements with education provisions had been created prior to the 1995 Aboriginal Self-Government Policy, for example the aforementioned James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement, this policy was important because it established a new willingness on the part of the federal government to constitutionally protect the rights negotiated in self-government agreements. Rights set out in agreements that are protected by the constitution are thus considered to be treaty rights, making them much more difficult to violate, restrict or rescind than those established in previous agreements.

Since 1995, there have been a number of self-government agreements and agreements in principle signed that explicitly address jurisdiction over education. Examples of these are the Nisga'a Final Agreement (1998), the Anishinaabe Government Agreement-in-Principle (1998) and the Westbank First Nation Self Government Agreement (2003). These agreements generally contain provisions stating that the First Nation(s) will have jurisdiction over pre-school, elementary and secondary education, including the power to make laws with regards to education. However, as many commentators have noted, these agreements also all include at least one clause stating that the education provided by the First Nation must be comparable to that provided in the provincial system, in effect

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[4] The policy is also known as the Inherent Right of Self-Government Policy.

constraining the participating community's ability to truly exercise jurisdiction and control over education (McCue, 1999; Morgan, 1998).

British Columbia recently began a new approach to negotiating jurisdiction over education with First Nations in the province. Rather than negotiating jurisdictional issues with each First Nation through the self-government agreement process, a framework agreement between the province, the federal government and First Nations in B.C. was signed in 2006 that outlined a process for transferring responsibility for elementary and secondary on-reserve education to First Nations in B.C. that decided to opt-in to the agreement. As part of the agreement, a B.C. First Nations Education Authority composed of all participating First Nations acts as a regulatory body for teacher certification, school certification and the development of curriculum standards for core courses. Supported by the passage of both federal and provincial legislation[5], participating First Nations were able to make laws with regard to education and design and deliver education programs. In 2010 a new "comparable education" approach was announced by the federal government in which First Nations students in B.C. would be able to transfer without academic penalty to provincial schools. To access the new approach First Nations were required to either sign an education self-government agreement or sign on to a new Tripartite Education Framework Agreement. The Tripartite Education Framework Agreement was signed between the government of Canada, B.C., and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, with almost all First Nations opting in to the agreement (AANDC, 2012).

In terms of off-reserve education, a number of provinces have produced policy frameworks and initiatives designed to improve the quality of education provided to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in their schools. For example, Manitoba created the *Aboriginal Education Action Plan, 2004-2007* (2004), Saskatchewan has an *Indian and Métis Education Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12* (1995), British Columbia

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[5] Federally, Bill C-34, titled the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act, received royal assent in December 2006. In British Columbia, Bill 46, The First Nations Education Act, received royal assent in November 2007.

developed a framework for the creation of Education Enhancement Agreements, and both Ontario (2007) and Alberta (2002) have produced reports titled *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Education Policy Framework*. All of these policy initiatives are designed to enhance Aboriginal student, parent and community participation in provincial education structures and improve learning outcomes for Aboriginal learners. However, it is difficult to ascertain how effective these provincial initiatives have been in bringing about real change.

1.4.7   1996 to Present

Numerous reports and policy statements have reiterated the calls to recognize and work towards a comprehensive understanding of First Nations' jurisdiction over education as a key element of Aboriginal self-government. The 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* recommended that federal, provincial, and territorial levels of government move to recognize education as a core area of jurisdiction in self-government, placing emphasis on the importance of capacity development to the transition process. According to the Commission, acknowledging First Nations' jurisdiction over education would involve First Nations passing their own education policies and legislation and regulating all aspects of education. To this end, the Commission proposed that Aboriginal education systems be developed consisting of multiple levels of organization, including local communities, Aboriginal nations, multi-nation organizations and Canada-wide networks.

In the federal government's response to RCAP, a report titled *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, the government acknowledged that it was lacking in the area of capacity building and pledged to make capacity building a focus in the negotiation and implementation of self-government agreements. However, the report had very little to say on the issue of education. In the space devoted to the topic, it was briefly stated that the federal government would work with First Nations to support education reform on reserves with the goal being to:

…improve the quality and cultural relevance of education for First Nations students; improve the classroom effectiveness of teachers; support community and parental involvement in schools; improve the management and support capacity of First Nations systems; and enhance learning by providing greater access to technology for First Nations schools (Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1997: 16).

Despite the clear demand in both RCAP and *Tradition and Education* that the federal government recognize education as a core element of Aboriginal self-government, *Gathering Strength* failed to include any mention of the relationship between self-government and First Nations' jurisdiction over education.

In 2000 the Auditor General issued a report on the state of First Nations education, concluding that more needed to be done to close the education gap between First Nations and other Canadian students (Auditor General of Canada, 2000). In particular, the report noted that there was considerable confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the federal government in First Nations education, and a lack of information on actual education costs, appropriate performance indicators, and the state of many education funding agreements. Two years after the Auditor General's report, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) established the Minister's National Working Group on Education to provide strategies for improving the quality of First Nations education, and improving education outcomes for First Nations students. The group had a series of recommendations, including that the federal government commit to jurisdictional discussions with First Nations that include capacity building measures and strategies for implementation, and that the federal government and First Nations work together to establish the role of INAC in First Nations education (Minister's National Working Group, 2002).

Despite the strong recommendations made in these two reports, a follow-up study by the Auditor General in 2004 found that the federal government had done little to address the issues (Auditor General of Canada, 2004). In response, the department prepared a paper titled *Education Action Plan* in 2005 that outlined how they were addressing each of the

concerns raised by Auditor General (INAC, 2005). The Action Plan was organized around five key areas: strategy and action plan; roles and responsibilities; funding; accountability; and performance measurement, monitoring and reporting. The centerpiece of the report, however, was a First Nations Education Policy Framework and a First Nations Management Framework to be developed in partnership with First Nations. The policy framework, projected to be completed in June 2006, was to outline a strategic vision for First Nations education and clarify the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. The management framework was to institute performance indicators and targets, outline a new funding model and establish accountability measures, and had a projected completion date of June 2007.

To develop these two frameworks, INAC joined with the AFN to form an education policy framework joint steering committee. The steering committee held regional dialogues with various First Nations and education organizations in 2006. However, the projected completion dates for both the policy framework and management framework passed with no documents produced and the AFN reported that INAC halted the collaborative process in 2007 and had proceeded alone (personal communication, 2008).

In December 2008 INAC unveiled their plan: the *Reforming First Nation Education Initiative*. This initiative consisted of two programs: the Education Partnerships Program (EPP) and the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP), details of which were released in December 2008 (INAC, 2008; INAC, 2008a). The EPP was designed to encourage and support tripartite partnership agreements between regional First Nation organizations, provincial ministries of education and INAC. The partnerships were to improve coordination between First Nation and provincial schools and promote the sharing of expertise and service provision among partners. The FNSSP provided First Nation regional organizations or band operated schools with funding to develop school success plans, implement student learning assessments and adopt a performance measurement system.

Considering the trajectory of federal First Nations education policy, this initiative was very much in line with the government's position since 1993 which has been to formally

accept and support Indian Control of Indian Education in theory, but to interpret 'control' as primarily administrative. The initiative emphasized implementing provincial standardized assessment systems and the push for greater alignment with provincial schools. Further, the program guidelines for the EPP state that only regional First Nation organizations are eligible recipients of funding and FNSSP program guidelines state that priority will be given to regional organizations over individual band councils, in effect pushing First Nations to professionalize the administration of their schools. The impetus for the programs was framed in terms of the need to increase accountability, get greater value for money, and improve First Nations students' human capital. Nowhere in the government's discussion of the initiative was there mention of First Nations' jurisdiction over education or the relationship between education and self-government, and there was very little reference to the role of education in strengthening and supporting First Nations' languages, cultures and knowledge.

While these changes were taking place, there was also movement in relation to residential schools. In May 2006 the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was formally approved by all parties involved.[6] Under the terms of the agreement, former residential school students were provided monetary compensation in the form of a 'common experience payment' along with additional compensation based on their years of attendance at a residential school. The agreement also established an Independent Assessment Process for former students to pursue claims of sexual and physical abuse, provided 125 million dollars for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to continue their healing programs, granted additional funding to support local and national commemoration projects, and included provisions for the establishment of a five year

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[6] The Indian Residential Schools Agreement was signed by the Government of Canada; the Plaintiffs as represented by the National Consortium and the Merchant Law Group; Independent Counsel; the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit representatives; the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada; the Presbyterian Church of Canada; the United Church of Canada; and Roman Catholic entities. The full agreement can be found here:
http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/IRS%20Settlement%20Agreement-%20ENGLISH.pdf.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[7] Further, in June 2008 the federal government finally issued a formal apology for its role in the creation and operation of the residential school system.[8] For the thousands of former residential school students who are no longer living, however, the apology and compensation have come far too late.

In 2011 two major government reports were produced focused on First Nations education: the Report of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education and the Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (National Panel, 2011; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). The findings of both studies were quite similar to those of previous reports: the education system for First Nations is fractured and is not meeting the needs of First Nations peoples. Both the National Panel and the Standing Senate Committee recommended that a First Nations Education Act be co-created with First Nations communities, and that items to be covered by the legislation include the creation of regional educational organizations to provide second and third-level services, the development of stable and adequate funding mechanisms, recognition of the jurisdictional authority of First Nations over education, and clear roles and responsibilities for all parties. In addition, the National Panel report called for immediate funding increases to be implemented in fiscal 2012-2013 that would increase education funding by an amount equal to the percentage increase for provincial schools, and that would bring teacher and administrator compensation to a level equivalent with provincial schools in the same province.

In response to these reports, the 2012 federal budget outlined a plan to create education legislation, stating:

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[7] On November 14, 2013 it was announced that the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be extended for one year.

[8] The churches involved in operating residential schools also issued formal apologies. The United Church of Canada was the first to apologize in 1986. Following suit, in 1991 the Anglican Church, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate offered their apologies. The Presbyterian Church apologized in 1994.

…the Government will work with willing partners to introduce a First Nation
Education Act and have it in place for September 2014. The purpose of this
legislation is to establish the structures and standards to support strong and
accountable education systems on reserve. This will set the stage for more
positive education outcomes for First Nations children and youth. The
Government will also work to explore mechanisms to ensure stable, predictable
and sustainable funding for First Nations elementary and secondary education
(AANDC, 2012).

While the budget addressed a key recommendation of the National Panel and Standing
Senate Committee reports, the government couched the proposed legislation in
accountability discourse; First Nations jurisdiction, culture, and language were not
mentioned. In addition, the immediate funding increases recommended by the National
Panel were not implemented.

Following the budget announcement the government forged ahead with developing the
promised legislation, holding consultations and releasing a legislative blueprint document
in July, 2013. Response to the blueprint from First Nations was swift. The AFN passed a
resolution asserting First Nations control of education and rejecting the federal approach
(AFN, 2013). Statements denouncing the proposed legislation have been made by a
number of organizations, including the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (2013),
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit and BC Assembly of
First Nations (2013), and Chiefs of Ontario (2013), in addition to numerous First Nation
communities. The primary concerns are that the proposed legislation flouts First Nations
jurisdiction over education, that adequate consultation did not take place, and that the
blueprint released fails to address funding concerns or provide sufficient protections for
First Nations languages, cultures, and pedagogy. Many of these organizations have called
on First Nations communities to develop and implement their own education acts prior to
the federal legislation being released. At the time of writing, the federal government was
expected to release a draft of the First Nation Education Act and table a final version
prior to the end of 2013.

1.4.8   The Legacy

The cumulative legacy of this history has been poverty, marginalization, and much despair. Deprived of an economic base, family relationships disrupted, and Indigenous ways of knowing denigrated, colonialism has taken an exacting toll on First Nations communities. First Nations have relatively high incarceration rates, infant mortality rates, and high school drop-out rates, higher rates of smoking, alcohol, and drug abuse, and have a disproportionate burden of ill-health (FNIGC, 2012; NCCAH, 2012; Perrault, 2009). Yet, as Lutz (2008) has argued, First Nations have been subordinated, but not subjugated. This is an important distinction, as it recognizes that First Nations peoples have not been conquered; Indigenous languages, cultures and knowledges have persisted. In the last few decades demands for control of education have grown (AFN, 1988; AFN, 2010; Castellano et al, 2000; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; RCAP, 1996) and there has been an "intellectual activation" led by Indigenous scholars and elders (Battiste, 2002: 4). As will be seen in the next section, which documents the current demographic and educational picture, these actions have brought significant improvements and yet it is clear that much still needs to change.

1.5   Current Demographic and Educational Picture

The most recent national data available, from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), indicates that there are approximately 1.4 million people in Canada who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population.[9] Roughly 850,000 people identify as First Nations, and 637,000 report being Registered Indians (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Approximately half of First Nations peoples who report being a Registered Indian live on reserve (49.3%).

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[9] Thirty-six Indigenous communities were not included in the National Household Survey either because enumeration was not permitted, was interrupted, or could not take place due to natural events. Statistics Canada reports that the effect of this missing data on national-level statistics and most provincial/territorial statistics is small, but that it can be significant for smaller areas (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

The First Nations population is young, and is growing at a much faster rate than the overall Canadian population. In 2011, roughly half of First Nations peoples were under the age of 25 (48.8%) and between 2006 and 2011 the First Nations population increased by 22.9%. As a point of reference, those under age 25 make up 29.5% of the non-Aboriginal population and during the same period the non-Aboriginal population grew by 5.2%. This high growth rate is partly due to a higher natural birth rate. However, it cannot explain all of the increase. Over the last 40 years, from 1971 to 2011, the Aboriginal population has more than quadrupled in size. For comparison, the total Canadian population increased by 55.2% during the same time period. Part of the extraordinary increase in the Aboriginal population has been attributed to ethnic mobility, in which individuals who previously did not identify as Aboriginal begin to do so in later census years; a phenomenon that has been credited in part to growing pride in Indigenous identities (Guimond, 2006).

The NHS also provides some data on language knowledge. Close to one-quarter of First Nations people were able to carry on a conversation in at least one of more than 60 Indigenous languages (22.4%), and roughly two-in-five reported that an Indigenous language was spoken regularly at home (18.0%) (Statistics Canada 2013c). Indigenous language knowledge was more prevalent among those living on reserve, with 44.7% able to carry on a conversation in an Indigenous language. From 2006 to 2011 the proportion of First Nations people who could converse in an Aboriginal language declined by 5.4 percentage points (Statistics Canada, 2013c). The 2008/2010 First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS)[10] results provide a slightly different picture of language knowledge, showing that 69.6% of First Nations adults who live in First Nations communities could speak or understand an Indigenous language at at-least a basic level,

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[10] The NHS and the RHS have different target populations and sampling procedures. The NHS uses a random sample of 4.5 million Canadian dwellings, which is slightly less than one-third (30%) of all private dwellings in Canada in 2011. The NHS sample was selected from the 2011 Census of Population dwelling list (Statistics Canada, 2013c). The target population of the RHS is First Nations communities, and the sampling design is structured to provide representative data at the regional and national levels. Two-hundred-and-sixteen First Nations communities participated in the 2008/2010 cycle (FNIGC, 2012).

and for 36.2% it was the language used most often at home (FNIGC, 2012). This represented an increase from the 2002/2003 RHS, in which 22.3% spoke an Indigenous language most often at home. First Nations adults with higher levels of education were more likely to be strong language speakers. As the RHS report stated, "These results highlight an important possibility—that higher education and First Nations language ability can go hand in hand" (FNIGC, 2012: 47). The RHS data also showed that 67.1% of First Nations adults living in First Nations communities participated in cultural events at least sometimes, and 79.9% felt traditional spirituality was at least somewhat important to them.

With regard to formal educational attainment, in 2011 60.2% of First Nations people aged 25 to 64 had completed high school and 44.8% had a postsecondary education (PSE) qualification. More specifically, 13.2% had obtained a trades certificate, 19.4% a college diploma, 3.6% a university certificate or diploma, and 8.7% a university degree. PSE attainment was lower for First Nations people who had Registered Indian status (42.3%) than those who did not (52.1%). Among those with Registered Indian status, both college and university attainment was higher for those living off-reserve (21.2% and 10.9%, respectively) than those living on reserve (14.8% and 4.7%, respectively) (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

Trend data from 1996 to 2011 reveals a clear increase in both the absolute number and the proportion of First Nations peoples who completed high school and obtained PSE credentials (Gordon and White, 2013).[11] During this time period, the proportion of the First Nations population age 25-64 that had not completed high school decreased from 46% in 1996 to 40% in 2011 and the proportion of the population with PSE increased from 27% in 1996 to 38% in 2011.[12] In absolute terms, from 1996 to 2011 there was a

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[11] Comparisons across census years must be interpreted with caution due to differences in the population identifying as Aboriginal in each census year, known as ethnic mobility, as well as differences in the questionnaires and survey methods.

[12] The proportion of the First Nations population with postsecondary education reported by Gordon and White (2013) differs from that reported by Statistics Canada (2013) due to differences in defining

total cumulative increase of more than 84,000 First Nations postsecondary graduates (Gordon and White, 2013).

Taking into account education data for the non-Aboriginal population, however, it is clear that much work remains to be done to ensure that the education system is supporting the success of First Nations learners. In 2011 almost two-thirds (64.7%) of the non-Aboriginal population aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification in 2011. Of this group, 12.0% had a trades certificate, 21.3% a college diploma, 4.9% a university certificate or diploma, and 26.5% a university degree. While the First Nations population is achieving trades and college credentials at a rate roughly equivalent to the non-Aboriginal population, there is a large difference in university attainment. In addition, trend data shows that between 1996 and 2011 the gap in PSE attainment between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples actually widened (Gordon and White, 2013). Troublingly, recent projections by Gordon and White (2013) suggest that this gap will continue to grow over the next 10 years, particularly for those living on reserve.

While these statistics may lead some to despair, the purpose of sharing these figures is not to be debilitating, but to demonstrate the need for change and to inspire action. It should be remembered that the data shows clear improvements are being made. There are significantly more First Nations peoples completing high school and going on to PSE today than there were just 20 years ago and participation in cultural activities and knowledge of Indigenous languages has remained; evidence that the work of First Nations students and all those committed to First Nations education has been achieving results. At the same time, the data also provides a stark argument against complacency.

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postsecondary attainment. Gordon and White grouped those who reported postsecondary education but had not attained a high school diploma as "less than high school", while Statistics Canada groups this as having postsecondary education.

1.6   Overview of Dissertation

Each of the articles in this dissertation addresses a policy or theoretical issue at a different point on the learning continuum. The first article, *First Nations Early Learning and Child Care in Canada*, examines federal policy specific to First Nations early learning and child care (ELCC). This period, from before birth to early childhood, is foundational to the lifelong learning journey (Battiste, 2005). While the importance of First Nations ELCC initiatives have been well-established (AFN, 1989; Ball, 2005; Greenwood and De Leeuw, 2004; RCAP, 1996), analysis of federal policy specific to ELCC in First Nations communities has been lacking. This article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the policy landscape by examining the historical role and relationship of the federal government in the financing and delivery of First Nations ELCC, outlining the current state of federal early learning policy, and presenting national data relevant to First Nations ELCC to assess how it can inform policy as well as reveal the data gaps that remain.

The second article, *Standardized Testing and First Nations Schools: A Case Study* wades into the K-12 realm to examine the impact of the use of provincial standardized testing in an on-reserve elementary school in Ontario. This research was the result of a partnership effort between the community education committee, the school administration, and myself as the researcher. Using a case study approach, the perspectives of the school administration and teachers were explored in relation to three research questions: 1) Why might an Indigenous school choose to implement a regional standardized assessment? 2) How does this impact the schools' ability to provide a culturally based education? 3) What challenges does a First Nations school face in implementing a standardized assessment? While this study presents only one school's experience, it provides insight into both the benefits and issues that can result from administering standardized testing in First Nations schools and informs the literature on standardized assessment.

The third article, *Educational Expectations of First Nations Applicants to Postsecondary Education*, utilizes data from a large-scale Canadian survey to look at the relationship between personal, family, community, and academic factors and the educational

expectations of First Nations learners. Past research has shown that First Nations learners experience barriers and challenges in pursuing higher education, including cultural alienation, lack of role models, distance from home communities, and inadequate financial resources (ACCC, 2010; Holmes, 2005; Malatest, 2004; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2000). Little is known, however, about the educational expectations and aspirations of First Nations learners. Expectations are a fundamental part of the attainment process, and have been shown to be a key predictor of eventual educational attainment (Astin, 1977; Beal and Crockett, 2010; Brookover et al. 1967; Carpenter and Fleishmann 1987; Hossler and Stage 1992; Nurmi, 2004; South, Baumer and Lutz 2003). Most theories of educational expectations, however, have been developed based on the experiences of non-Indigenous youth. Therefore, this article also explores prominent theories of educational expectations to assess their applicability to First Nations learners.

It is important to note that the focus of these studies is specifically on First Nations education; while some of the literature reviewed here includes information related to Métis and Inuit I do not directly address Métis or Inuit education. While First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are often grouped together under the term "Aboriginal", they are three very distinct groups each with their own histories, languages, and cultures. Research has shown that they also experience very different social, economic, historical, and political realities (Gordon and White, 2013; Health Council of Canada, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2013a). Therefore, this dissertation focuses specifically on First Nations education, recognizing that this is itself not unproblematic given the over 600 distinct and diverse nations that this term encompasses.

While each of these chapters is connected by their focus on First Nations learning, the inclusion of each is also serendipitous / the result of the practicalities of conducting research with First Nations. The piece on standardized testing came out of conversations between my supervisor and the administration of the participating school, who were interested in documenting and better understanding the school's experience with provincial standardized assessment. The early learning article developed from work conducted for the First Nations Information Governance Centre, in which I contributed a

chapter to their national report on the First Nations Regional Health Survey. The educational expectations article was developed in consultation with my supervisor to look at the postsecondary piece of the educational journey.

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Chapter 2

2 First Nations Early Learning and Child Care in Canada

2.1 Introduction

The period from before birth to early childhood is foundational to the lifelong learning journey (Battiste, 2005). During infancy and early childhood, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities are developed providing a basis for future development. Historically, First Nations children spent the first years of their lives with their extended family, who all shared responsibility for their upbringing (RCAP, 1996). In this environment, children received the language, values, and knowledge needed to survive on the land. While traditional child-rearing practices are still utilized in many First Nations families, they have also been disrupted due to the impacts of colonization and social change.

Reflecting the changing social environment, First Nations leaders, organizations, scholars, and parents have increasingly called for formalized services designed to meet children's learning and care needs, commonly referred to as early learning and child care (ELCC)[13] (AFN, 1989; AFN, 2005; AFN, 2012; Greenwood and Shawana, 2000; Native Council of Canada, 1990; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2005). ELCC has been linked to a host of benefits for children, including greater school readiness, higher postsecondary attendance, increased earnings, and more pro-social behaviour (Barnett, 1995; Muennig et al, 2009; Reynolds et al, 2011). Families are also said to benefit, primarily because child care programs allow parents to participate in the labour force (National Council of Welfare, 1999; Shellenback, 2004).

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[13] Early learning and child care (ELCC) refers to learning and care services provided for infants and young children. In the literature, the terms "early childhood education and care", "early childhood development services", and "early childhood care and development", among others, are also used. These terms are largely considered to be synonymous. The term early learning and child care (ELCC) is used in this paper as it is the most commonly used term in the Canadian context.

While there is a large body of research focused on early learning and child care, very little literature has examined the ELCC experiences of First Nations children and families. The reports that do exist generally assume that First Nations children experience the same benefits from ELCC as other children, including improved school readiness and health-promoting behaviours (AFN, 2012; Ball, 2008; Preston et al, 2012; RCAP, 1996). In addition to these overarching benefits, however, ELCC has been conceptualized as an integral part of self-government (Greenwood and De Leeuw, 2004); a means of reinforcing Indigenous culture, language, and identity (AFN, 1989; RCAP, 1996); a hub for community engagement and inter-sectoral service delivery (Ball, 2005; Ball, 2009), as well as a "critical site for cultural rejuvenation, for the (re)building of community, and for the establishment of healthy Aboriginal communities in the future" (Greenwood, 2009).

Not all early learning initiatives, however, are created equal, and much of the existing literature has focused on understanding and defining "quality" in First Nations ELCC contexts (Ball, 2009; Best Start Resource Centre, 2010; Greenwood, 2009; Greenwood and Shawana, 2000; Preston, 2008; Preston et al, 2012; Stairs and Bernhard, 2002). A key theme running throughout this literature is that for First Nations ELCC to be of high-quality, it must be culturally-based and community driven. The right of First Nations communities to control their own systems of education has long been asserted, and early learning is considered to be one piece of the larger education framework (AFN, 1989; AFN, 2010; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Native Council of Canada, 1990; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2005; RCAP, 1996). The arguments for First Nations control of education have been remarkably consistent over the last forty years, and are echoed in the First Nations ELCC literature today. At the core, First Nations assert that education is critical to the transmission of cultural and linguistic identity. This is vital not only to the continuation of First Nations languages and cultures, but also to fostering pride and a positive sense of self in First Nations children.

A second key theme in the literature on quality First Nations ELCC is the importance of caregiver and extended family involvement (Preston et al, 2012; Greenwood, 2009; Best Start Resource Centre, 2010; Greenwood and Shawana, 2000; Preston, 2008). Involving

caregivers and extended family members, including elders, in the ELCC environment can promote intergenerational linkages and help children to see the early learning centre as a safe place. This is reflective of traditional First Nations practices, in which all community members have a role and responsibility in the care and education of children (RCAP, 1996). The importance of including caregivers in decision-making processes is also emphasized, which is seen both as a way to help ensure that programming is meeting each child's needs and that the caregiver is being empowered.

Involving caregivers and community members in ELCC initiatives may also contribute to broader community engagement. In a study of three First Nations communities located in British Columbia, Ball (2005; 2009) found that community-based child-care services can act as a "hook" to bring community members together and promote greater access to a wide range of wellness programs and supports. In these communities, the child care centre is designed to be the "hub" in a larger system of family and community-centred supports, including health services and cultural activities. Both parents and service providers stated that while parents are often hesitant to seek supports for themselves or other family members, they are willing and interested in accessing child care services. By co-locating the child care services with other community supports, parents become aware of and eventually more comfortable accessing a wide range of programs and activities. In the communities studied, this mobilized community members in support of child development and promoted social cohesion.

Only a handful of evaluative studies have been conducted examining the effectiveness of ELCC programming in meeting stated objectives, and all have been focused on Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) (Cruz and McCarthy, 2010; Health Canada, 2003; Health Canada, 2010; Mashford-Pringle, 2012; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). AHS is a federally funded initiative that provides primarily centre-based programming for pre-school age children. Separate funding mechanisms exist for on-reserve and off-reserve populations. The off-reserve component, known as Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), was started in 1994-95, while Aboriginal Head Start On reserve (AHSOR) began in 1998.

Both programs have been found to be highly regarded by children, parents, community members, and federal bureaucrats. Findings from the evaluation studies suggest that the programs improve children's school-readiness, promote healthy behaviours, and increase cultural knowledge (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012; Health Canada, 2003; Mashford-Pringle, 2012). Anecdotal evidence suggests that families and communities also benefit, but the results have not been consistently tracked (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012; Mashford-Pringle, 2012). It should be noted, however, that the methodological shortcomings of these studies, which include small sample sizes, cross-sectional designs, and inability to capture program variations, have limited the conclusions that can be drawn about program outcomes and have in many ways highlighted the challenges associated with determining appropriate and measurable evaluative criteria. Nonetheless, the findings have been encouraging.

From a policy perspective, child care and development are issues that have long been of concern to the Canadian government (Standing Senate Committee, 2009). Views on the appropriate role of government in child care and early learning, however, vary widely and it is a highly contested space. While considerable attention has been paid to federal ELCC policy (Friendly, 2000; Friendly et al, 2002; OECD, 2006; Standing Senate Committee, 2009), analysis of federal policy specific to ELCC in First Nations communities has been lacking. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the policy framework used by the federal government to guide First Nations ELCC initiatives. To understand the present, however, it is necessary to look to the past. Thus, this chapter begins by critically analyzing the history of federal First Nations ELCC policy in Canada.

The initial intention was to focus exclusively on First Nations ELCC policy. It quickly became apparent, however, that this history could not be divorced from wider federal ELCC initiatives. To understand the relationship between these two policy tracks, this chapter interweaves the history of ELCC policy focused on First Nations children and families with national ELCC policy developments. Utilizing frame analysis, particular attention is paid to the various ways in which care and learning have been constructed. In addition, this chapter includes an analysis of national survey data on the early learning

and care experiences of First Nations children and families. The focus is on examining how this data can inform our understanding of First Nations ELCC policy in Canada, and what data gaps remain.

In summary, this chapter examines three primary research questions:

1. What is the historical role and relationship of the federal government in the financing and delivery of First Nations early learning and child care?
2. What is the current state of federal ELCC policy for First Nations in Canada?
3. How can available national data inform policy development?

2.2 Early Learning and Child Care Policy in Canada

In Canada, ELCC falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial governments. The federal government plays a role, however, through funding allocations, the development of national policy, and participation in intergovernmental initiatives. In addition, the federal government is directly responsible for the provision of early childhood services for First Nations communities. This section traces federal ELCC policy, both overall policy and policy specific to First Nations peoples, from the 1960s through to the present. While each province has its own ELCC policies and programs, this study focuses exclusively on the federal level.

Throughout this section, frame analysis serves as a point of entry to understanding how and why federal First Nations ELCC policy emerged and developed as it did. Frame analysis is an approach to studying how events, issues, etc., are interpreted and defined (Goffman 1974). First introduced by Gregory Bateson in the 1950's, the concept was further developed and popularized by Erving Goffman two decades later (Goffman, 1974). Goffman's conceptualization of framing is rooted in symbolic interactionism, taking as a starting point that objects and events do not hold meaning in and of themselves, but rather take on meaning through social interaction and interpretive processes. According to Entman (1993):

> *Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating*

text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993: 52).

While more commonly used in media studies and social movement studies, frame analysis is employed here to explore the interrelationship between the ways in which ELCC is framed and federal policy approaches.

2.2.1   1960s: Child Care without the Early Learning - Care as a Welfare Measure

In the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government addressed child care through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Started in 1966, CAP was a cost-sharing funding mechanism through which the federal government provided 50% of the cost of provincial social assistance programs. Child care was specifically included in the list of services eligible to receive CAP funding so long as certain conditions were met, including that the child care be regulated and available only to needy families (Madore and Blanchette, 1997). Thus, through CAP, the federal government encouraged the development of child care services but placed child care squarely in a welfare framework, designating it as a program for the poor.

Early childhood services for First Nations communities were virtually non-existent during this period. Greenwood (2006) notes that the few services that did exist were "sporadic and inadequately funded and as a result were often short-lived" (p. 13). The 1966/1967 *Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*, known as the Hawthorn Report, was one of the first federal studies to bring attention to the needs of First Nations children (Canada Indian Affairs Branch, 1966; Canada Indian Affairs Branch, 1967). The Hawthorn Report extensively documented the system of education available to First Nations children, and drew attention to the low educational attainment of First Nations youth. While the issue was framed as a problem of the "Indian" child not being socialized to succeed in school, effectively laying blame with First Nations communities rather than the school system, the report recommended the development of on-reserve nursery and kindergarten programs in which parents could be involved in programming and the

teachers could use "material and ideas from the background of the child" (Canada Indian Affairs Branch, 1967). No mention was made of child care arrangements for younger children, which was in line with broader thinking at the time that separated "care" from kindergarten.

That there was little federal involvement in child care for First Nations during this time period is not surprising. As evidenced by CAP, child care was framed as a welfare provision – an area in which the federal government had taken little action for First Nations. The Indian Act does not explicitly require that the federal government provide welfare services to First Nations, and federal welfare service provision at the time was kept to a minimum (Canada Indian Affairs Branch, 1966).

2.2.2   1970s to 1980s: Competing Paradigms and the Emergence of First Nations Child Care Research

Calls for a national approach to child care started as early as 1970, when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended that child care be a national priority for all, rather than a welfare provision (Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1970). Child care, it was argued, could be a key tool for promoting gender equality. Fueled by demographic and social changes, such as the growing prevalence of single-parent families and women's increased participation in the labour force, child care continued to grow as a policy concern into the 1980s.

In response to increasing political pressure, the 1980s saw two major government studies of the child care issue. The first, the Task Force on Child Care led by Dr. Katie Cooke, was announced by the Liberal government in 1984 shortly before their electoral defeat. The reporting structure of the Task Force as well as the choice for chair reflected the ascendancy of feminist arguments positioning child care as a women's rights issue. The Task Force reported directly to the minister responsible for the status of women, and Cooke had served as the first president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Jenson, 2009). While the incoming Conservative party allowed the Task Force to continue their work, the Special Committee on Child Care was established by the House of Commons in 1985 to study the same issue. In undertaking its work, the Task

Force commissioned 25 research projects and received briefs from 200 organizations. The final report was delivered in 1986, and it painted a picture of child care services in Canada as a "miscellaneous collection of measures that fail to adequately meet the needs of children and their parents" (Task Force on Child Care, 1986: 277).

The report also provided one of the first national examinations of child care services for Indigenous peoples, revealing the patchy, inadequate nature of services available. It was reported that in 1984, only 1,432 child care spaces existed on reserve, with the vast majority of these located in Ontario and Alberta. Total federal expenditures on child care by INAC in 1984-1985 amounted to $2.2 million in Ontario, and only $305 540 in the rest of the country combined.[14] Off-reserve, specialized child care for First Nations and Inuit peoples was said to be virtually non-existent. The report also included First Nations' perspectives on child care; specifically, that child care was not only a mechanism for enabling parental participation in the labour force, but also a means for transmitting culture and language (Task Force on Child Care, 1986). While the Task Force shed some light on the state of First Nations child care, no recommendations specific to First Nations children were made. The primary recommendation of the Task Force was that a national child care system for all children up to age 12 be created funded jointly by federal and provincial governments. The recommendations failed, however, to reference Indigenous child care services (Task Force on Child Care, 1986). In the end, the recommendations of the Task Force were unpalatable to the government of the day, and no action was taken as the government awaited the report of the Special Committee (Timpson, 2001).

Established as an all-party committee, the Special Committee on Child Care eventually produced three reports; one from each political party. The majority report was issued by the Conservatives and its recommendations stood in sharp contrast to those of the Task

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[14] Under the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement, the federal government engaged in a cost-sharing agreement with the province of Ontario to provide a range of social welfare programs, including child care (Task Force on Child Care, 1986). Under the terms of the agreement, the federal government reimbursed 95% of the costs of child care services to the province.

Force. Whereas the Task Force had called for a national approach to child care akin to the health care system, the majority report of the Special Committee specifically renounced this approach calling instead for tax breaks for parents and capital and operating grants for child care providers, both commercial and not-for-profit (Special Committee on Child Care, 1987). Therefore, while both the Task Force and the Special Committee framed child care as largely custodial (to provide care while parents were at work), there was a clear divide in how each felt that parental choice could best be supported by government. With regard to First Nations child care, the sole recommendation was to conduct research into day-care needs for "Native and rural children, and children with special needs" (Harder, 1995).

When the government introduced the National Child Care Strategy in 1987, it was clear which set of recommendations had been followed; the Strategy was largely in line with the recommendations of the Special Committee, ignoring the Task Force report. The National Child Care Strategy committed $5.4 billion over seven years and consisted of three major components. The first was tax assistance to families with young children, valued at $2.3 billion. This included a Child Care Expense Deduction and a Child Tax Credit Increase. The second component was the Child Care Initiatives Fund (CCIF), which was a $100 million fund that supported child care research and innovation. Finally, the third and largest component was the proposed Canada Child Care Act, which was a $3 billion cost-sharing arrangement intended to provide a legislative framework for child care services, replacing the CAP day care provisions (House of Commons, 1988). The Act was to be implemented as soon as negotiations with the provinces were complete, with the goal of creating 200,000 new child care spaces (Health and Welfare Canada, 1988b).

While the federal government touted the Strategy as a sweeping reform designed to improve the "availability, affordability, and quality of child care in Canada" (Health and Welfare Canada, 1988b), it received little support from child care advocates. The proposed Child Care Act (Bill C-144) in particular faced much criticism for lacking national principles and quality standards, subsidizing for-profit care, and for creating an

insufficient number of spaces to meet demand. Child care advocates argued that no child care system was better than a flawed system (Scherer, 2001; White, 2001). While not prominent in the public critiques of the Strategy at the time, the tax-based approach to child care was also wholly inadequate for First Nations families, many of whom either had tax-exempt status or fell below the low-income cut-off line.

After receiving third reading in 1988 the bill died on the Senate order paper when the federal election was called. Following the Conservative party's re-election in 1988, the government implemented the tax measures and the CCIF, but stated that "because of the fiscal situation, the government is not in a position to proceed with the [creation of additional child care spaces] at this time" (Wilson, 1989).

The CCIF component of the National Child Care Strategy provided $100 million of funding over a seven year period for projects focused on research and knowledge mobilization (Health and Welfare Canada, 1988a). "Indian and Inuit" families were identified as one of seven priority areas for support, and roughly twenty percent of the budget was allocated to projects focused on Indigenous children. Up until this point, Indigenous child care had received little research attention. The funding supported 98 community-based projects over a seven year period, ranging from efforts to test and develop community standards for day care services, to the development of culture and language curriculum (Greenwood and Shawana, 2000). Nonetheless, the funding was short-term and proposal-based, therefore few communities were able to benefit. Further, while a government document stated that "these initiatives have shown how child day care can play a role in achieving community wellness" (Government of Canada, 1994, p.1 as cited in Greenwood and Shawana, 2000), the fund did not provide dollars for the development of child care services.

In 1988, less than a year after the National Child Care Strategy was first released, the Minister of National Health and Welfare Canada announced that an additional $1 billion would be dedicated to child care, with $60 million of that going to a new initiative for First Nations child care (Health and Welfare Canada, 1988c). The money was to be used "to determine child care requirements of on-reserve Indians, to train and develop child

care workers, and to build and operate accredited child care services for Indian communities" (Health and Welfare Canada, 1988c). These funds, however, were withdrawn the very next year with the government citing the fiscal situation as the rationale for the withdrawal (AFN, 1989; Greenwood and Shawana, 2000; Canada, 1989).

First Nations communities did not make great gains during this period, but the groundwork began to be laid for future developments. The Cooke Task Force report highlighted the lack of child care services for First Nations communities and the Special Committee report and subsequent National Child Care Strategy explicitly recognized the need to better understand the child care requirements of First Nations peoples living on reserve. First Nations organizations also began to focus on child care as a policy issue, in large part enabled by the aforementioned CCIF. Both the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Native Council of Canada received CCIF funding to conduct major research studies on child care both on- and off-reserve. The reports painted a comprehensive picture of the state of First Nations child care, and the picture was bleak. Due to jurisdictional disputes between federal and provincial governments, with each feeling the other should be responsible for First Nations child care, most First Nations communities had been left without any services, and urban First Nations families lacked access to culturally appropriate care. The recommendations from both reports were clear: child care must be considered an essential service with stable, adequate funding provided through agreements that recognize First Nations peoples' inherent right to develop and operate their own culturally-based child care programs (AFN, 1989; Native Council of Canada, 1990).

2.2.3 Early 1990s: The Beginning of Federal First Nations Child Care Programming

The early 1990s saw a number of international initiatives that impacted the Canadian child care landscape. First, in May 1990 Canada signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1990 Canada also co-hosted the United Nations World Summit for Children, in which the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of

Children was adopted. The Declaration had a host of goals, including the "expansion of early childhood development activities, including appropriate low-cost family- and community-based interventions" (UNICEF, 1990). These two documents were significant, as they began to shift the discourse surrounding child care away from parental rights and towards children's rights and broadened the notion of care to more explicitly include child development.

In response to the Summit, the federal government introduced Brighter Futures: Canada's Action Plan for Children (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992a). The Action Plan was a series of steps taken to improve well-being for Canada's children. The first step was the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (completed in December 1991). The second was the Child Benefit, proposed in the February 1992 federal budget.[15] The third was Canada's Action Plan for Children (CAPC), touted by the government as "a blueprint for the federal government's actions to support children and families in Canada and around the world," and the fourth and final component was the Child Development Initiative, which committed $500 million over five years to fight child poverty through community-based programs. It was stated that the Child Development Initiative programs would be administered in partnership with the provinces, territories, First Nations, communities, and non-government organizations and dollars were earmarked specifically for community-based programs for Inuit and on-reserve First Nations communities (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992a). Overall, however, the plan was criticized for being "far from visionary", and was perceived as an ineffective replacement for the failed child care program that had been promised by the government in the previous National Child Care Strategy (Hall, 1992).

During this time, the evidence base for child care began to grow. In particular, much needed representative data about child care arrangements in Canada was provided by the

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[15] The Child Benefit was a tax benefit that increased existing child tax benefits for low and middle income families, and consolidated three previous programs (Family allowances; Child credit; and Refundable child tax credit) into one Child Benefit (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992b).

National Child Care Survey. With results released in 1992, the survey provided information on the preferences and experiences of parents with children under 13 years of age. However, while the principal investigators used the newly emerging terms "early childhood education and child care" and noted the many purposes for care arrangements (including stimulating children's development), the questions asked within the survey focused on care as a custodial activity with very few questions addressing the educational aspects of care (Lero et al, 1992). Completely absent from the survey data was any information on care arrangements among First Nations peoples. As with many national surveys, the sampling design excluded First Nations peoples living on reserve (Lero et al, 1992).

Nonetheless, these initiatives helped to increase discussion and debate, such that child care was a major election issue in 1993. As a centrepiece of their party platform, *Creating Opportunity: The Liberal Plan for Canada* more commonly referred to as the "Red Book", the Liberal government committed $720 million to increasing the number of regulated child care spaces by 50,000 a year to a maximum of 150,000 new spaces (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993). The spaces were to be funded by a 40% contribution from the federal government, 40% from the provinces, and 20% from parents using an income-based sliding scale. There were two conditions placed on the commitment. First, that the provinces agree to the plan, and second that 50,000 additional spaces would only be added in each year that came after a year with 3% economic growth.

The approach to child care outlined in the *Red Book* was clearly based in the equal opportunities discourse popularized in Cooke's Task Force report. This was evidenced by the rationale provided for the child care commitment, which focused on enabling parents' participation in the labour market, as well as supporting single mothers' ability to pursue training and employment (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993).

The *Red Book* child care commitment did not mention First Nations child care, and it appeared that the funding for regulated child care spaces promised would not include First Nations communities. The only mention of programming for First Nations children was a promise to initiate an Aboriginal Head Start program, but it was only for children

living in urban centres and large Northern communities. Interestingly, the rationale provided was based in an entirely different discourse than the child care commitment. Aboriginal Head Start was justified as a social welfare initiative; an early intervention strategy that could help Aboriginal children aged 3 to 5 overcome the "debilitating effects of poverty." It was said to be part of the educational system, and that it would be designed and controlled at the community level with culture and language components.

Following the Liberal election victory, the child care commitment was restated in Human Resources Development Canada's (HRDC's) 1994 discussion paper focused on reviewing social security programs. This document also hinted at an emerging shift in how child care policy was being framed. While the document included child care under the section titled "Meeting the needs of working parents", it noted that many provinces were beginning to situate child care within broader child development approaches. The urban Aboriginal Head Start program was cited as the sole example of a federal program that linked child care with early childhood development (HRDC, 1994).

A 1994 report from the Native Council of Canada highlighted the inadequacy of child care services during this period (Jetté and Dumont-Smith, 1994). In 1993 there were more than 58,000 First Nations children age 0 to 4 and 97,000 age 5 to 14, yet only 108 regulated[16] Indigenous child care services existed in the entire country. In addition to the overall inadequacy, existing child care arrangements were inequitably distributed across the country (Table 1). For example, while there were 41 regulated services on reserve in Ontario, there were none in Saskatchewan. This is because the federal government engaged in formal funding arrangements with some provinces and communities, but not all. Even among provinces that had agreements in place, which included Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec, the agreements differed widely. The result was a

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[16] *Regulated child care* refers to services that comply with provincial/territorial licensing standards. Each province and territory has its own standards and mechanisms to ensure compliance, but typically regulations concerning child-to-adult ratios, minimum standards for facilities, and training requirements for staff are included (Cool, 2004).

patchwork of services in which parents' access to care varied considerably from one region to another (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1994).

Table 1 Regulated Indigenous Child Care Services, 1993

Province / Territory	On reserve or in Indigenous community	Off reserve in urban area
British Columbia	11	1
Alberta	9	0
Saskatchewan	0	11
Manitoba	0	3
Ontario	41	2
Quebec	4	1
Newfoundland and Labrador	1	0
New Brunswick	1	0
Nova Scotia	0	1
Prince Edward Island	0	0
Northwest Territories	18	0
Yukon	4	0

Source: Jetté and Dumont-Smith, 1994, p. 71

In 1995, federally funded First Nations-specific early childhood education and care became a reality with the introduction of two new programs. The first, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), was announced in May 1995 by the Minister of Health and was a fulfillment of the previously mentioned 1993 Liberal *Red Book* promise. Modelled after the American Head Start Program, the initiative was started as a four year pilot project with $83.7 million in funding. The program goals and principles were developed in consultation with 25 urban and northern communities and were designed to promote high quality programming that allowed for community diversity. Intended for children under age six, Aboriginal Head Start was unique in that it outlined key components that each project was to incorporate, including culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental and family involvement. In addition, programs that wished to receive funding under the initiative needed to be non-profit, have First Nations involvement in planning, design, and operation, involve primary caregivers, and include in-kind contributions from the community (Aboriginal Head Start, 1998).

The second new program introduced in 1995 was the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI), operated by HRDC. Funding of $72 million over three years was committed, and $36 million each year thereafter. The mandate was to create 6,000 new child care spaces on reserve.

The two programs were operated by different government departments, and had completely separate administrative apparatuses. This meant that each not only had different guidelines and reporting structures, but also distinct mandates. Operated by Health Canada, Aboriginal Head Start conceptualized child care as a preventative tool to foster the well-being of at-risk children, as well as a means to promote cultural identity. The mandate of the FNICCI was quite different. As an HRDC initiative, child care was framed as way to support labour market attachment among parents.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) drew attention to the absurdity of this situation, citing the need for holistic programs that address the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of children. The RCAP report criticized the government's disjointed approach, stating that having various departments and government levels establishing programming constituted an "impediment to rational planning" (RCAP, 1996). Another criticism of federal ELCC programs for First Nations children was that they were typically short-term, making it difficult to build quality, stable programs within Indigenous communities. Going beyond mere criticism, the RCAP (1996; 643) report offered a clear, concise recommendation for moving forward:

Federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early childhood education funding strategy that

(a) *extends early childhood education services to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence;*

(b) *encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education;*

(c) *maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration;*

(d) *offers one-stop accessible funding; and*

(e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options.

The RCAP report was successful in drawing attention to Indigenous policy and programming issues. With regard to early childhood programming, the federal government's response to RCAP, titled *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, promised to expand Aboriginal Head Start to on-reserve communities. This promise was reiterated in the 1997 Liberal election platform and the 1997 Speech from the Throne, and was formally launched in October of 1998. While the expansion of Aboriginal Head Start to reserve communities was a welcome initiative, it was a far cry from the comprehensive, integrated early child care funding strategy that RCAP had recommended. Moreover, the disjointed nature of federal programming continued, with Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve administered by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada, the urban and northern component by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and FNICCI continuing to fall under the umbrella of HRDC.

2.2.4   Mid to Late 1990s: From the Needs of Parents to the Needs of the Child

While First Nations communities were finally beginning to see federal investment in national child care initiatives, budget deficits and high national debt threatened the gains made. In 1995, the Liberal government released a federal budget that drastically reduced funding for social services, and shifted the relationship between the federal and provincial governments. As commentators at the time noted, it seemed the federal government was attempting to "get out of the health and welfare business" (Torjman and Battle, 1995: 11). As part of the new relationship with the provinces, the federal government eliminated CAP and the Established Programs Financing, which was a federal transfer program created by Trudeau in 1977 directed towards health and postsecondary education (PSE), and replaced them with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) (HRDC, 1996). Under CAP, $300 million had been distributed annually to the provinces specifically for child care services (Friendly, 2000). CHST provided block funding to the provinces for health, welfare, and PSE with no conditions attached.

Therefore, the provinces were free to spend the dollars as they saw fit, with no monies specifically dedicated to child care. CHST marked a clear change in the federal government's approach. The standards that were in place under CAP were eliminated, as were the cost-sharing provisions and the specific allocations for social services. This meant that provinces no longer had an incentive to provide CAP-eligible social services (Day and Brodsky, 1998).

In addition to funding changes, there was also a shift in the federal, provincial, territorial relationship regarding social policy. In the mid-1990s, the federal and provincial/territorial governments had begun to discuss a new approach to social policy reform, creating the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal to guide these efforts. The new approach was formalized in 1999 with the signing of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA).[17] SUFA was meant to foster closer relations between the provincial/territorial and federal governments, defining roles and responsibilities in relation to health and social spending. It also outlined key principles, including ensuring that all Canadians have access to social programs of comparable quality wherever they live, and that adequate, stable, and sustainable funding be provided for social programs (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministerial Council, 1999).

Without digressing too much into constitutional debates, it is worth noting that while national Indigenous organizations were beginning to be included in First Minister's meetings and national discussions in the 1980s, they were excluded from the negotiations that led to SUFA. In addition, when the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal was created in 1997, there were no Indigenous representatives as members. In 1999, the National Chief of the AFN wrote to Jean Chretien, then Prime Minister, requesting that the AFN be able to participate in the talks before the final agreement was reached. First Nations peoples had a strong interest in the formulation and implementation of SUFA, given its role in shaping the future of social spending as well as serving as a model for

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[17] The Social Union Framework Agreement was signed by the federal government and the provincial/territorial first ministers, with the exception of Quebec.

future policy relationships. That same month, however, the agreement was signed with no Indigenous signatories (Dacks, 2001).

While no Indigenous leaders were included in the negotiations, the final SUFA agreement did include explicit recognition of Indigenous rights, stating that "nothing in this agreement abrogates or derogates from any Aboriginal, treaty or other rights of Aboriginal peoples including self-government" (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministerial Council, 1999). In addition, in a communiqué issued after the signing of the agreement, the first ministers stated that the federal and provincial governments would work with Indigenous organizations in the implementation of SUFA whenever the implementation was to impact Indigenous peoples. This positioned Indigenous peoples as a special interest group, as opposed to full partners. So while SUFA was a political advance in terms of the recognition of treaty rights, it was also seen as a limited response in which Indigenous peoples would be included only when the Council decided that it was pertinent (Dacks, 2001).

As part of the early social union discussions, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments agreed that one of their first efforts should be focused on children in poverty. Reflecting this priority, the 1997 Speech from the Throne placed prominence on early childhood initiatives. Two key initiatives in particular were noted: the National Child Benefit and the National Children's Agenda (Governor General, 1997).

The National Child Benefit (NCB), implemented in 1998, included both monthly payments to low and middle income families with children designed to replace provincial child benefit payments, as well as a reinvestment component in which the provinces and territories could reduce their social assistance up to the amount of the NCB and reinvest these savings into services to reduce child poverty and enable parental participation in the labour market (Ministers Responsible for Social Services, 1998). In essence, the National Child Benefit standardized the child tax benefits received by families across Canada and promoted the development of provincial/territorial programming to further meet the needs of low-income families with children.

The focus of the National Child Benefit was largely in line with the previous approach to child care, which emphasized promoting labour market attachment as a key rationale for providing child benefits. It was a far cry, however, from a national child care system. Following the failure of the 1993 Red Book promise to build a national child care program, the National Child Benefit was seen as compensatory measure. In fact, in an interview with the Globe and Mail, a federal cabinet minister stated that "we cannot implement a national child care program...this is not something we have the ability to initiate. In lieu of that, we came up with the national child benefit" (McCarthy, 1999). Thus, the government attempted to appease calls for early learning services for all families by providing benefits to the poor, falling back on the notion of child care as a welfare service.

Since its inception, the National Child Benefit has explicitly included provisions for First Nations communities. The First Nations component, called the First Nations National Child Benefit Reinvestment (FNNCBR) initiative, had the same goals as the overall initiative: to reduce child poverty and enable low-income parents to participate in the work force (AANDC, 2008). Also, similar to the reinvestment component of the NCB, the FNNCBR allowed Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to reduce social assistance payments by an amount equal to the Child Tax Benefit and reinvest the funds into projects aimed at lessening child poverty (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Minister's Responsible for Social Services, 2010). In reality, the FNNCBR merely ensured that First Nations families received the same benefits provided to other families located within the same province, and that INAC was able to utilize the same reinvestment measures afforded the provinces and territories. The benefit for First Nations was that there were provisions permitting each First Nation to decide how to allocate their reinvestment funds, such that the resulting projects varied considerably from one First Nation to another. Further, the eligible activity areas were similar to those of the NCB, but also included cultural enrichment.

The purpose of the second initiative, the National Children's Agenda, was to delineate a common vision for child well-being, including goals and action items. First announced in

1997, it took two years before the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal released a draft National Children's Agenda and public consultation document. Unlike the SUFA negotiations, Indigenous organizations were included in the development of the National Children's Agenda in large part, it seems, due to the determination of these organizations to be part of the process (Dacks, 2001). The discussion document released in 1999 was stated to have been prepared in consultation with Canada's five national First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations and a section of the document focused on outlining Indigenous perspectives on children's issues.

The overall goals outlined within the Agenda included having children who are physically and emotionally healthy; safe and secure; successful at learning; and socially engaged and responsible (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal, 2000). While the National Children's Agenda was touted as the "first step towards developing a comprehensive, long-term strategy to improve the well-being of Canadian children" (Aylward, 1999), Friendly (2006) argues that there was little to no follow-up on whether or how the goals of the agenda were being met. The agenda did, however, begin to refocus government policy on child development and children's rights along the lines of the approach outlined approximately ten years earlier in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

2.2.5   2000 to 2006: Bringing Care and Education Together

With Canadian policy just catching up to framing child care in relation to children's rights and child development, internationally another major shift in thinking about early care was underway. Historically, care and education had been seen as two separate systems with different policies, administration, and approaches to understanding children. Through the 1990s, however, an abundance of child development research based in neuroscience was produced that began to challenge this approach.

During the 1990's, the seeds of the evidence basis for a "neuroscience" frame in Canada were sown with the establishment of the Human Development Group within the

Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR). The Human Development Program was founded by Dr. Fraser Mustard in 1993, and brought together top North American researchers to study child development (Pence and Benner, 2000). Their work, along with that of others in the field, began to provide new ways of thinking about the importance of the early years. In particular, neuroscience research was beginning to provide evidence that birth to age six is a crucial period for human development, impacting behaviour, health, and learning throughout life (McCain and Mustard, 1999; Mustard, 2006).

It was not until the year 2000 with the announcement of the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA) that it was clear neuroscience research was informing federal policy. The language contained within the ECDA was reflective of the emerging focus on child health, development, and education. In essence, the ECDA provided $2.2 billion in funding to the provinces and territories over a five year period to be used for programs and services for children under six years of age. The programs or services were to focus on four priority areas: healthy pregnancy and infancy; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning, and care; and community supports (First Ministers, 2000).

A key criticism of the ECDA was that it did not provide enough money for large-scale initiatives, such as child care programs. The new neuroscientific approach, it seemed, had led to a focus on the educative aspects of child development at the expense of child care. In addition, the ECDA did not include any mechanisms to ensure funds were focused on quality early childhood development, or that provinces were increasing their overall spending on early childhood services. McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) noted that after receiving the ECDA dollars, many provinces simply cut their provincial spending on early childhood programs such that there was no net impact for families.

Further, Indigenous organizations were once again excluded from the negotiations leading to the agreement, and not included as signatories. The only mention of First Nations in the document was a line stating "Governments will work with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to find practical solutions to address the developmental needs of Aboriginal children" (Canadian First Minister's Meeting, 2000). This was a reflection of

governments' understanding of the role of Indigenous organizations in intergovernmental relations as laid out in SUFA, in which Indigenous organizations were only to be included in intergovernmental negotiations for issues directly related to Indigenous peoples, not general matters.

As a complement to the ECDA, a federal early childhood strategy specific to Indigenous children was announced in 2002 (Government of Canada, 2002). Funding of $320 million over five years was provided, focused on five key areas:

1) Enhance Aboriginal Head Start and the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative

2) Address fetal alcohol syndrome

3) Research and knowledge mobilization, through the introduction of the Aboriginal Children's Survey

4) Capacity building, through the creation of the Aboriginal Service Provider's Network (ASPN) and funding to enable six national Aboriginal organizations to participate in intergovernmental work on early childhood development

5) Increased coordination and integration of federal programming for Inuit and on-reserve First Nations children and families

The fifth focus area was particularly noteworthy as it appeared the government was committing to address a problem that had been consistently identified by First Nations as a barrier to successful ELCC programming – the haphazard, fragmented federal approach (Greenwood and Shawana, 2000; RCAP, 1996). Under the initiative, the three federal departments involved in providing federal ELCC programming, Health Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, agreed to work together to improve coordination of the delivery of federal early childhood programming for Indigenous children and families. In particular, the goal was to examine whether a "single window" approach would be feasible that would consolidate federal early childhood programs. The government was stated to be working with Indigenous stakeholders in developing the plan, and conducting a national dialogue process to ensure Indigenous participation in the development.

While these activities were taking place, the federal government launched a new ELCC initiative in 2003 to respond to criticism that the ECDA had neglected child care. The new initiative, called the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, provided $350 million dollars annually to increase the availability of early learning and child care programs for children under age six. It also set out principles for ELCC: accessible, affordable, quality, inclusive, and parental choice (First Ministers, 2003). According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)[18] Minister Stewart, it was to be "the beginning of a very solid national day-care program for Canadians" (Lawton, 2003).

The Multilateral Framework had a number of similarities to the ECDA. The rationale for the initiative was based in labour market attachment and neuroscientific understandings of child well-being, and there were provisions put in place requiring that the provinces/territories publicly report on their early learning and child care initiatives. Also similar to the ECDA, the Multilateral Framework contained a line stating that the governments would continue to work with Indigenous peoples in meeting the needs of Indigenous children. In addition to these similarities, however, the Multilateral Framework also shared many of the pitfalls of the ECDA. The framework was criticised for not providing enough funding to implement quality child care systems, and for failing to prevent the provinces/territories from simply reducing their own child care contributions after receiving the funds (McCain, Mustard, and Shanker, 2007). Also, as an intergovernmental policy rather than legislation, the Multilateral Framework was not enforceable and was subject to change with successive governments.

In the same year that the Multilateral Framework was introduced, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted an intensive review of early childhood policies and services in 12 member countries, including Canada. The report on Canada, released in 2004, noted that Canada had a "patchwork of uneconomic,

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[18] In 2003 Human Resources Development Canada was split into two separate departments: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Social Development Canada.

fragmented services, within which a small 'child care' sector is seen as a labour market support, often without a focussed child development and education role" (OECD Directorate for Education, 2004: 6). With regard to Indigenous child care services, the OECD team reported that Indigenous values, practices, and symbols were largely absent from "mainstream" ELCC settings, a troubling finding given that many Indigenous families lived in urban centres. The report also noted that national early years policy was in its infancy, and that care and education were still largely treated as separate entities.

The OECD report provided ammunition to ELCC advocates, who had been arguing for the importance of quality, regulated child care linked to early learning and development, and pressing for a national approach. In response, a key Liberal campaign platform of the 2004 federal election was a promise to build a national early learning and child care system, with $5 billion of dedicated funding over five years (Liberal Party of Canada, 2004). The program was to be based on the principles of quality, universality, accessibility, and developmental, referred to by the acronym QUAD.

After the election the Liberal government began negotiating with the provinces, and also made good on past promises to work with Indigenous peoples in determining how to implement ELCC strategies in Indigenous communities. To fulfil this promise, national First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations were asked to examine how the QUAD principles would be applied to Indigenous communities. The key message from the consultation sessions held with First Nations was that while the QUAD principles themselves were not problematic, any principles for First Nations ELCC must be developed by First Nations and reflect First Nations values, beliefs and traditions (AFN, 2005).

While federal ELCC strategies, both national and specific to Indigenous communities, appeared to be on the horizon, they soon fizzled. In negotiations with the provinces, the federal government was unable to establish a multilateral agreement. Instead, the government began to develop bilateral agreements with each province. In the end, nine provinces signed agreements in principle, and three signed final funding agreements

(Cool, 2007). Even these, however, would prove to be short-lived, as would any hope for a First Nations ELCC strategy.

2.2.6   2006 to Present: The Steady Erosion of ELCC

With the election of the Conservative party in 2006, ELCC policy shifted once again. In the Conservative party's first budget after coming to power, the bilateral child care agreements were cancelled. In their place, the government launched the Universal Child Care Plan (UCCP). The UCCP had two primary components: the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) and the Child Care Spaces Initiative. The UCCB provides a $100 per month taxable payment to all families with children under age 6, and is still in place as of October 2013. The Child Care Spaces Initiative, however, had a short life span. The initiative was to provide a $10,000 tax credit to employers or community organizations for each child care space they created, and was expected to create 25,000 new child care spaces a year. Shortly after the initiative was announced it was widely criticized for being an ineffective, piecemeal approach that would not result in sustainable, high quality child care (Code Blue for Child Care, 2007; HRSDC, 2007). First Nations organizations also criticized the initiative, arguing that the assumption that private businesses would create child care spaces was unrealistic for First Nations communities (Jamieson, 2007). The initiative was ultimately abandoned, with the funds transferred to the provincial/territorial governments and eventually rolled up into the Canada Social Transfer (HRSDC, 2007). However, part of the initiative was retained; the government still offers businesses a 25 percent investment tax credit up to a maximum of $10,000 for each child care space created.

As Cameron (2009) has noted, the federal government unilaterally ended all federal ELCC initiatives that were in place, with the exception of the Multilateral Framework which was simply not renewed at the completion of its five year term. Solidifying the new tax-based approach to ELCC, in the March 2007 federal budget the Conservative government introduced the Child Tax Credit (CTC). The CTC provides a $2,000 tax credit to parents per child under the age of 18 (Department of Finance Canada, 2007).

This translates into a maximum value of $300 per child, though the poorest families would not receive any value as they do not owe income tax.

The new policy approach ushered in by the UCCP can be seen as a repudiation of the ascendancy of neuroscientific rationales for ELCC. As previously noted, neuroscience research documenting the importance of the early years for future learning, behaviour, and health was used by ELCC advocates to argue for widely accessible, quality early childhood development programs and had begun to inform Liberal child care policy. The Conservative party framed this as an attack on parents, and an assertion that parents are not "good enough" to raise their children. This view was expressed by HRSDC Minister Diane Finley, who stated "It's the Liberals who wanted to ensure that parents are forced to have other people raise their children. We do not believe in that" (Delacourt, 2011). The government's new approach was clearly rooted in core Conservative values: the primacy of individual choice, free market economics, and conservative family values. While the policy promised to provide "choice in child care" and was couched in "parents know best" language (Conservative Party of Canada, 2006), the $100 monthly payment provided to parents under the policy is grossly inadequate for actually covering the costs of child care.

In 2009 the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology produced a report on ELCC recommending that the federal government play a more active role by appointing a Minister of State for Children and Youth, a National Advisory Council on Children, establish a pan-Canadian framework for ELCC programs and policies, and create and fund a research and evaluation system (Standing Senate Committee, 2009). The official response from the federal government essentially stated that the government would not be implementing any of the recommendations (Finley, 2009). The reason given was that ELCC is a provincial/territorial responsibility, reaffirming the new hands-off approach the government was intent on taking.

During this period, there has also been a steady erosion of federal interest in supporting ELCC for First Nations families. The longest running Indigenous early learning program, Aboriginal Head Start, has repeatedly been noted to be underfunded and falling short of

meeting community demand (Health Canada, 2003; Leitch, 2008; Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal, 1999; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). It is estimated that AHSUNC reaches approximately five percent of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children age zero to six living off reserve in Canada (4,640 children per year out of 89,000), while AHSOR reaches about 22% of First Nations children age zero to six living on reserve (9,000 of 40,290) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). While not every family would enrol their child in an Aboriginal Head Start program, close to half of AHSUNC sites had a waiting list in 2009-2010 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). The last funding increase either program received was a $5 million per year boost in 2007, but this was for training only, not to expand the program reach. The funding was also short-term, and while it was renewed in 2010-2011 it is set to expire in 2014-2015 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). With no new dollars, the combined impacts of population growth and inflationary pressures are in fact eroding program funding.

A recent evaluation of the AHSUNC program also noted that since about 2006 funding agreements have been short-term and renewal announcements have come at the last minute. This has created concern about the stability of program funding, and has led to increases in staff turnover at program sites (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). In addition, lack of national coordination among stakeholders working in First Nations ELCC was identified as a strategic gap that needs to be remedied; this recommendation has consistently been made since the 1996 RCAP report but has yet to materialize. In fact, the "single window" strategy that was being developed to promote greater coordination among First Nations ELCC appears to have been abandoned, with a 2007 study stating that it had been "consigned to oblivion". Interviews with government officials conducted for the study found that efforts to promote greater coordination among federal departments involved in First Nations ELCC programming had ceased (Jamieson, 2007). Nonetheless, First Nations organizations continue to stress the importance of a coordinated approach to First Nations ELCC (Parliament of Canada, 2011; AFN, 2012).

With regard to total spending on Indigenous ELCC programs, there was a slight increase in funding in 2005-2006 but figures have remained largely static since then with a slight decrease in 2008-2009. A troubling sign, 2008-2009 is the last year for which this information is publicly available.[19] Unfortunately, there is no current data available regarding federal spending on Indigenous ELCC, or the cultural relevance, quality, access or affordability of current programming.

As of the most recent federal budget, released in March 2013, ELCC for First Nations or otherwise still has not made its way back onto the national agenda. The budget has been criticized for emphasizing jobs and training, yet ignoring that affordable, high quality ELCC is a necessary component in any workforce development strategy (Campaign 2000, 2013). The federal government's actions have shown that the government has no interest in creating a national system or national standards for child care, preferring to leave ELCC to parental choice and the free market.

2.2.7   Federal Policy Summary

From the 1960s to the present the care and early education of children has been variously framed as a welfare measure for the poor, a tool to support parental labour market attachment, an equal opportunity measure, a means of promoting child development and well-being, and a parental choice. Each of these frames has been accompanied by different approaches and initiatives, creating an unstable, continually shifting policy and program environment.

For First Nations, the most prominent frames underlying federal initiatives have been care as a welfare measure, and as a tool to support parental labour market attachment. Unlike overall federal policy which generally shifted and changed with turnover in government, these differing frames have co-existed in time, but have been housed in different government departments. The result has been multiple programs operating with

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[19] The government had been publicly reporting federal spending on ELCC initiatives, including initiatives for Aboriginal peoples, since the 1999/2000 fiscal year on the following site: http://www.faeyc-adfje.gc.ca/menucdn-eng.jsp.

different missions, approaches, and operating structures, creating a complex web for communities to navigate. This is compounded by the multi-level and often contradictory relationships that govern First Nations – Canadian relations.

While federal ELCC policy relating to First Nations can be characterized as fractured and haphazard, First Nations communities and organizations have been remarkably consistent in their framing of the issue. Early learning and child care has generally been conceptualized by First Nations in relation to the need to holistically address the cultural, intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs of children, parents, and communities. This framing suggests the need for ELCC policy and programs that are coordinated, universally available (regardless of income level, parental employment, etc.), and developed and delivered by First Nations.

2.3 First Nations Regional Health Survey Results

In this section, a large-scale national data set is utilized to examine First Nations ELCC experiences. The purpose is to better understand the early learning and care arrangements of First Nations families, consider how these can inform policy, and identify information gaps that limit policy development.

The national data set used is the First Nations Regional Health Survey (known as the RHS for short). The RHS is a First Nations administered and controlled survey operated by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC).[20] Following the OCAP[TM] principles of ownership, control, access and possession (First Nations Centre, 2007), the aggregate data remains with the RHS National Office, while regional data is returned to the participating communities. Further, the research design and survey questions are

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[20] The impetus for the survey came from the AFN Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH), who were concerned about the exclusion of First Nations peoples living on reserve from national health surveys being conducted by Statistics Canada. To address this information void, the RHS was created. The AFN CCOH appointed the FNIGC to operate the survey (FNIGC, 2011). The First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Health Canada is the primary funder of the RHS (FNIGC, 2013).

grounded in a cultural framework that recognizes the importance of the "total health of the total person in the total environment" for understanding health outcomes.

The most recent data available is from the 2008/2010 survey cycle. Two-hundred-and-sixteen First Nations communities participated in the cycle, and 72.5% of the target sample was achieved. The survey does not include First Nations peoples living outside of First Nations communities. The present analysis uses data gathered through the child survey, which was completed by the child's parent or guardian and includes results for 5,877 children age 0 to 11 years old. Following the OCAP^{TM} principles, analysis involved a process in which specific analyses were requested and the data tables were run by the RHS data team. The RHS data team used the SPSS Complex Samples Module to ensure that the complex stratified sampling approach was accounted for in estimates produced. This analysis is supplemented with data on child care arrangements obtained from the RHS National Report (FNIGC, 2012), and is compared with findings from the 2002/2003 RHS and the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey (ACS) and Aboriginal People's Survey (APS) where applicable. The ACS is a national survey of Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve First Nations children under six years of age, whereas the APS is a national survey of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve First Nations population 6 years and older.

Guided by Indigenous perspectives on learning, a number of aspects of children's learning and care experiences are examined including children's ability to speak and understand a First Nations language, participation in cultural activities, the importance caregivers place on children's language knowledge and participation in cultural activities, sources of support for understanding culture, participation in Aboriginal Head Start, child care arrangements, and time spent reading outside of school. Indicators related to formal school experiences are also included, such as the incidence of repeating or skipping a grade. The results are contextualized using descriptive variables available in the data set, such as parental income, parental level of education, child's age, gender, community size,

and urban, rural, or remote/special access community status[21]. Results reported are significant using 95% confidence intervals, unless otherwise noted.

2.3.1   Language and Culture

Learning a First Nations language was highly valued by parents, with 64.1% (± 2.2) stating that it was very important for their child to learn a First Nations language, and 28.4% (± 2.0) stating that it was somewhat important. This was roughly the same as was reported in the 2002/2003 RHS (Very important = 64.3%, Somewhat important = 28.6%), but is considerably higher than reported for off-reserve First Nations children in the 2006 ACS, in which 68% of parents stated that it was very or somewhat important for their child to learn an Aboriginal language (Bougie, 2010).

Respondents were also asked about their child's current knowledge of First Nations languages. Almost half of those surveyed reported that their child could speak or understand a First Nations language, even if only a few basic words (49.7% ± 2.2), and one quarter (25.0% ± 1.8) reported that their child used their First Nations language in daily life. Of those indicating that their child could speak one or more First Nations languages, 11.6% could do so at an intermediate/fluent level, while 88.4% could speak a few words or at a basic level. While not directly comparable due to age and question differences, according to the 2006 Aboriginal People's Survey, about 17% of First Nations children (age 6-14) could speak and understand a First Nations language, and about 32% were able to understand only (Bougie, 2009).

A couple of factors were found to be significantly related to children's ability to speak or understand a First Nations language. Children in remote/special access communities were

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[21] The classification of First Nations communities into urban, rural, remote, and special access is derived from AANDC's four level ordinal measure of remoteness based on distance from a service centre. A service centre is defined as a geographic area with government services, banks, and suppliers. In this context, a community classified as urban is a community located within 50 kilometers of the nearest service centre with year-round road access; a rural community is between 50 kilometers to 350 kilometers from the nearest service center with year-round road access; a remote community is over 350 kilometers from the nearest service centre with year-round road access; and a special access community has no year-round road access to a service centre. See Chan and Dahm (2000) for additional information.

more likely than those in rural communities to have knowledge of a First Nations language. Parental level of education was also associated with language knowledge; children who had at least one parent with a university degree or higher were more likely to speak or understand a First Nations language than children of parents with less than high school, high school, or college (Table 2).

With regard to the importance placed on learning a First Nations language, respondents in remote or special access communities were much more likely than those in urban areas or rural communities to report that it was very important for their child to learn a First Nations language (77.4%, 63.9%, and 59.8% respectively) (Table 3).

Table 2 Ability to Speak or Understand a First Nations Language by Community Type and Parents' Highest Education Level

(n=5685)

	% able to Speak or Understand a First Nations Language	95% CI
Community Type		
Urban	50.2	±4.3
Rural	46.5	± 3.1
Remote / Special Access	58.2	±6.3
Parents' Highest Education Level		
Less than High School	47.8	±3.3
High School	47.7	±4.3
College Diploma or Certificate	52.0	±4.3
Bachelors, Graduate or Professional Degree	62.4	±6.1

Table 3 Importance of Learning a First Nations Language by Community Type

(n=5749)

Community Type	% reporting learning a First Nations language is very important	95% CI
Urban	63.9	±4.5
Rural	59.8	±3.3
Remote / Special Access	77.4	±4.1

Traditional cultural events were also highly valued in the lives of First Nations children. Slightly over half of respondents (53.6% ± 2.6) felt that traditional cultural events were very important and an additional 33.5% (± 2.2) felt that they were somewhat important. In spite of the importance placed on traditional cultural events, most children did not

participate in traditional singing, drumming, or dancing groups or lessons outside of school hours (Table 5). The survey did not ask respondents about their child's participation in other types of cultural activities or events, and it is likely that the way this question was asked – focusing on participation in "groups or lessons" – underestimates children's engagement in cultural activities. There was a moderate increase in the importance placed on traditional cultural events in this survey (Very important = 53.6%) compared to the 2002/2003 RHS survey (Very important = 44.5%).

Table 4 Importance of Traditional Cultural Events

(n=5755)

	%	95% CI
Very important	53.6	± 2.6
Somewhat important	33.5	± 2.2
Not very important	8.3	± 1.2
Not important	4.6	± 1.0

Table 5 Participation in Traditional Singing, Drumming, or Dancing Groups or Lessons, Outside of School Hours

(n=5668)

	%	95% CI
Never	60.0	± 2.4
Less than once per week	15.1	± 1.4
1-3 times per week	8.3	± 1.2
4 or more times per week	3.4	± 0.8
Not Applicable	13.2	± 1.4

Children have many sources of support for understanding their First Nations culture. Grandparents (70.1% % ± 1.8) and parents (67.5% ± 2.2) were the most often cited

sources of support, followed by aunts and uncles (43.8% ±2.4). School teachers were also involved in helping to understand their culture for 41.9% of children (± 2.4). Compared with the 2002/2003 RHS, there was an increase in the proportion of respondents indicating each source of support across most categories, and the largest gains were made for grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, other relatives, and community elders.

Figure 1 People Involved in Helping Child Understand their Culture

Grandparents: 70.1 / 62
Parents: 67.5 / 66.9
Aunts and Uncles: 43.8 / 35.2
School Teachers: 41.9 / 30.5
Other Relatives: 33.3 / 22.6
Community Elders: 23.7 / 16.7
Other Community Members: 14.6 / 16.5
Friends: 14 / 10.1
No One: 3.3 / 5.2

Percent

■ 2007/2008, n= 5877   ■ 2002/2003, n=6422
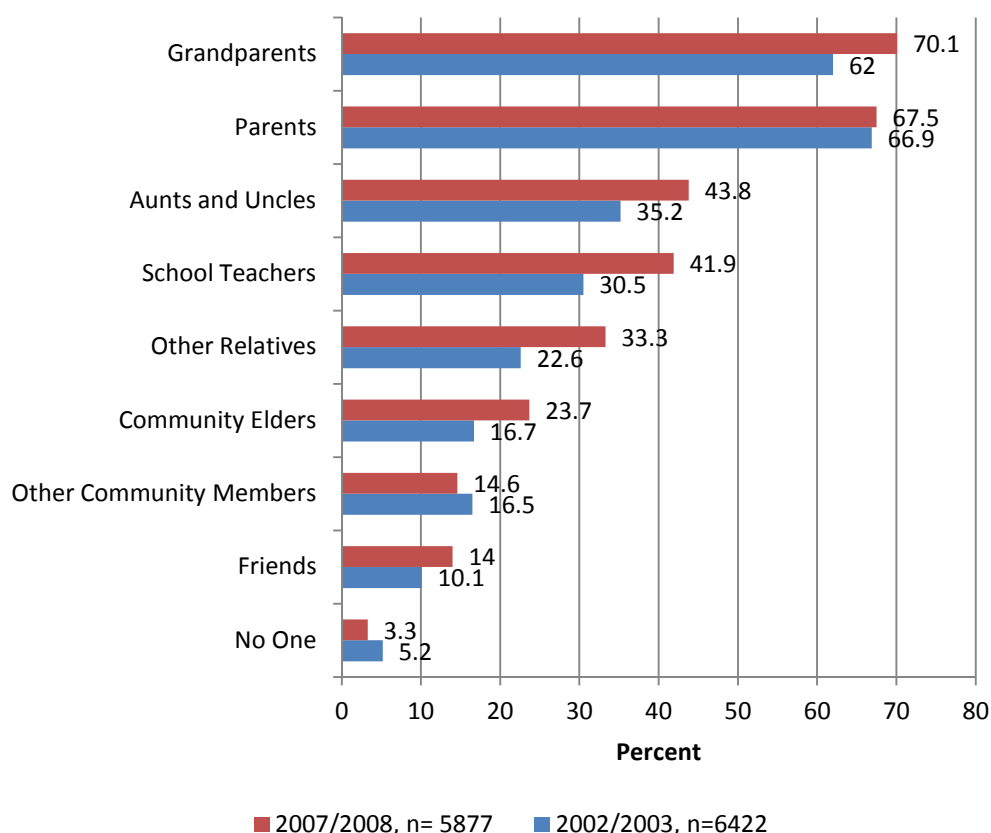
While family sources of support do not vary significantly by age, children's cultural support network in the community increases slightly as they get older. In particular, children over age five are more likely to have school teachers and community elders as a source of support in understanding their culture after age six.

Figure 2 Community Members' Involvement in Helping Child Understand their Culture by Age of Child

(n=5869)
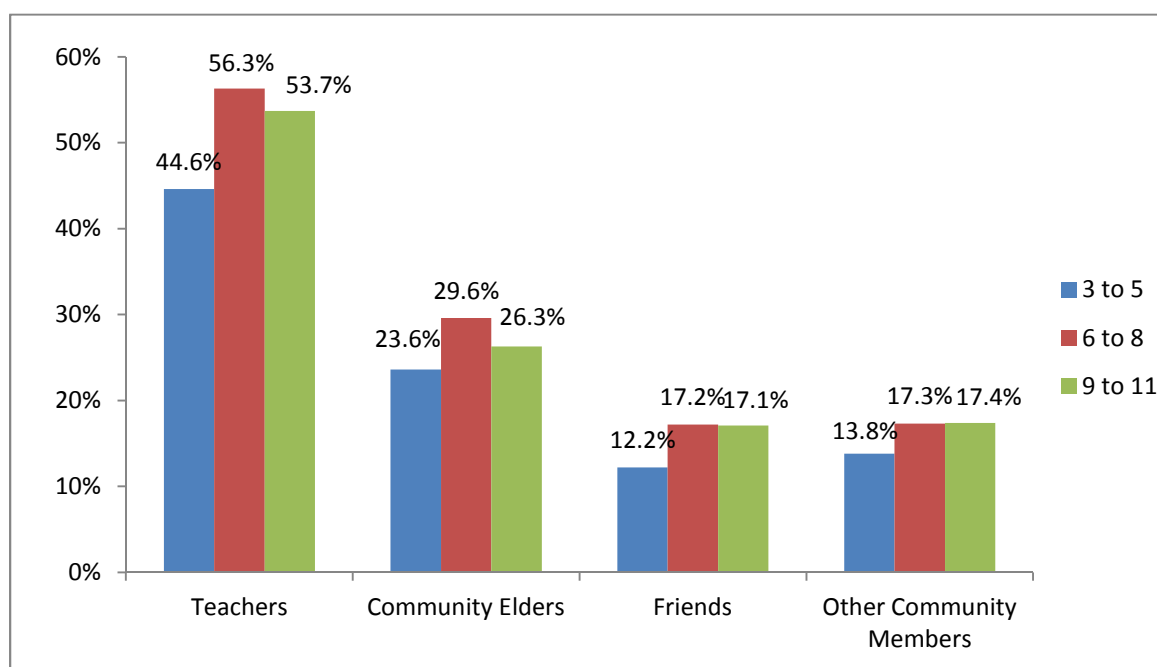
Parents' participation in the cultural education of their children increased with higher levels of formal educational attainment. Eighty-three point seven per cent (± 4.5) of parents with a bachelors, graduate or professional degree were reported to be involved in helping their children understand their culture, compared to 62.7% (± 3.1) of parents with less than a high school diploma. Higher levels of income were also positively related to parental participation, with parents with an income of under $25,000 being less likely to be involved in their child's cultural education than parents with income over $25,000 (Table 6). This suggests that parents who are successful in education and employment also maintain their connection to their culture.

Confirming the interconnectedness of language and culture, children who participated in traditional singing, drumming or dancing were more likely to speak or understand a First Nations language (Table 7).

Table 6 Parental Involvement in Helping Child Understand Culture by Parental Education and Income

Parents' Highest Education Level (n=5711)	Parents Helped Child Understand Culture (%)	95% CI
Under High School	62.7	±3.1
High School	69.9	±3.3
College Diploma or Certificate	72.4	±3.5
Bachelors, Graduate or Professional Degree	83.7	±4.5
Parental Income (n=5877)		
Under 25,000	63.4	±3.5
25,000-59,999	73.1	±2.9
60,000 and over	68.1	±3.7

Table 7 Ability to Speak or Understand a First Nations Language by Participation in Traditional Singing, Drumming or Dancing

(n=5668)

Participation in traditional singing, drumming or dancing	Speak or understand a First Nations language (%)	95% CI
Never	45.1	± 2.6
Less than once per week	57.5	± 5.1
1-3 times per week	60.3	± 8.2
4 or more times per week	67.1	± 9.4

2.3.2   Child Care and School Experiences

Less than one-third of First Nations children under age twelve were in some form of non-parental child care (28.8%). While many parents may choose to stay home with their child, data from the RHS adult survey showed that a relatively high proportion of First Nations adults age 18-29 living in First Nations communities struggle to afford child care (20.8%) (FNIGC, 2012).[22] Children who were in child care spent on average 21.1 hours per week in care. These figures were slightly higher when considering only children under age six; 39.2% of children birth to age five were in child care and they spent an average of 23.8 hours per week in care. More than half of First Nations children were cared for in informal, home-based settings (58.0%), primarily by a relative (49.2%). However, a sizeable proportion of children were cared for in formal settings (39.2%) (Table 8).

Table 8 Type of Child Care Arrangements

	% of those in child care
Child's home by relative	21.7
Child's home by sibling	4.6
Child's home by non-relative	1.7
Other home by relative	27.5
Other home by non-relative	2.5
Daycare centres, nursery school, preschool, private home daycare, or other	33.8
Before and after school programs	5.4
Other	2.7

Source: FNIGC, 2012

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[22] This figure underestimates the proportion of families who have difficulty affording child care as it did not control for whether the respondent had children.

Data on the off-reserve First Nations population is not directly comparable due to differences in the age categories, but 52% of children age two to five were reported to be in child care in the 2006 ACS (Findlay and Kohen, 2010). Unlike the on-reserve population, the most common type of child care arrangement for off-reserve First Nations children was a day care centre (46%). This was followed by a nursery, preschool or Head Start (17%), and then home-based care by a non-relative (14%). Roughly one-quarter of off-reserve First Nations parents reported that their children's child care arrangement promoted Indigenous culture (26%).

Unfortunately, the RHS did not ask parents whether their child care arrangements promoted Indigenous culture or were designed for Indigenous children. Respondents were asked, however, whether their child had ever attended an Aboriginal Head Start program. A little over one third (36.4% ± 2.9) of children age 0 to 11 had attended an Aboriginal Head Start program at some point in their lives. While attending an Aboriginal Head Start program did not have a statistically significant effect on whether a child had ever repeated a grade, children who had attended an Aboriginal Head Start program were slightly more likely to be able to speak or understand a First Nations language (56.5% ± 3.9) than those who had not attended (45.6% ± 2.7). First Nations children living off-reserve were much less likely to attend a First Nations specific preschool program, with only 17% of parents reporting that their child had ever attended a child care program specifically designed for First Nations children (Bougie, 2009).

In terms of elementary school attendance, virtually all children age 6-11 (99.2%) were reported to be currently attending. The only indicator of school performance included in the RHS is a measure of whether a child had ever repeated or skipped a grade. The data shows that children age 6 to 11 were much more likely to have repeated a grade (13.7% ± 1.8) than to have skipped a grade (3.1% ± 1.0). Further, the percentage of children who had repeated a grade increased significantly at higher age levels, with 17.9% (± 2.9) of children age 9-11 having repeated a grade. Boys age 6-11 were significantly more likely to have repeated a grade than girls of the same age (16.1% ± 2.4 vs. 11.4% ± 2.4).

While the percentage of children repeating a grade is much lower than results from the 2002/2003 RHS (18.0% of children age 6-11), it is significantly higher than grade repetition among all Canadian children. According to data from the 2006/2007 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, at age 9, 3.6% of children had repeated a grade (Thomas, 2009).

Table 9 Repeating or Skipping a Grade by Age Category

Age	Repeated a Grade (%)	95% CI	Skipped or Advanced a Grade (%)	95% CI
6 to 8	9.0	± 1.6	2.2	± 0.8
9 to 11	17.9	± 2.9	3.9	± 1.8

Only 2.6% of respondents (±0.6) reported that they had been told that their child has a learning disability, and 2.0% (±0.4) that their child has ADD or ADHD. The prevalence of learning disabilities is in line with the general population, of which 3.2% of school aged children are estimated to have a learning disability (Statistics Canada, 2007). Rates of ADHD in the general population have been hard to determine, but a 2002 study reported that estimates of the prevalence of ADHD in school-age children in Canada generally range from 5-10% (Romano et al, 2002).

A number of studies have shown that reading activities in the home can significantly impact children's literacy skills (Lipps and Yiptong-Avila, 1995). Recognizing the importance of reading outside of school, the RHS survey asked respondents how often their child reads or is read to for fun. Approximately one third of children (31.5% ± 2.0) read or were read to everyday, an additional one third do so a few times a week (35.2% ± 1.8). However, close to one in five children read or are read to less than once a month or almost never (17.5% ± 1.6). Off-reserve First Nations children appear to engage in reading activities more often, with 61% of parents reporting that their child age six to ten reads or is read to everyday (Bougie, 2009).

Figure 3 Reading or Being Read to for Fun

(n=5719)
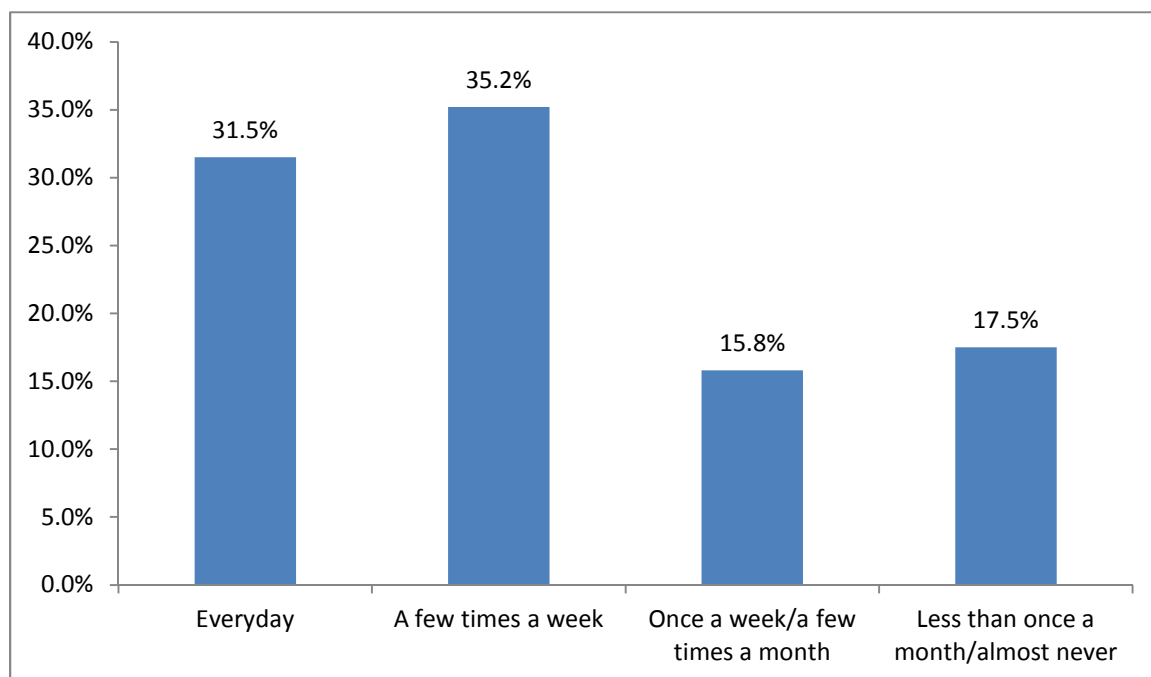
While formal measures of children's reading skills were not included in the RHS, children who read or are read to everyday or a few times a week were significantly more likely to speak or understand a First Nations language (51.7% ± 3.5 and 50.5% ± 3.5) than children who almost never read or are read to (39.7% ± 4.1).

Table 10 Reading or Being Read to for Fun by Ability to Speak or Understand a First Nations language

(n=5719)

Frequency of Reading	Speak/Understand a First Nations Language (%)	95% CI
Everyday	51.7	± 3.5
Few times a week	50.5	± 3.5
Once a week / few times a month	49.8	± 4.5
Less than once a month / almost never	39.7	± 4.1

2.4 Discussion

The RHS data presented above provides some insight into the early learning and care experiences of First Nations families. It appears that a relatively small proportion of First Nations children birth to age 11 are in non-parental child care – less than one-third. This proportion increases to two-fifths when considering only children age five or younger, but is still considerably lower than the 54.0% of children of the same age in the general Canadian population who were in child care in 2002/2003[23] (Bushnik, 2006). More than half of First Nations children who are in child care are in informal home-based settings, often the home of a relative. It is unclear from the survey why there are a relatively low proportion of First Nations children in child care, whether that be lack of access to child care, lower labour force participation rates, parental preferences, or another reason

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[23] This is the last year for which data is available. This statistic is from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY).

entirely.[24] It was found, however, that one in five First Nations adults age 18-29 struggled to afford child care suggesting that accessibility is a contributing factor.

The data also show that First Nations families value language and cultural knowledge for their children, yet relatively few children are fluent in the language or regularly participate in traditional cultural activities. This suggests that many families may have difficulty accessing language and cultural supports. At the same time, many First Nations languages are threatened and the children of today will be relied upon for their preservation (Norris, 2004). Given the connection between language learning, the development of a positive self-identity, school achievement, and health (McIvor et al, 2009) policy should be developed to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn their First Nations language.

The importance caregivers place on children's cultural and language knowledge suggest that there is a strong potential for children to carry on the language and culture of their ancestors if the resources are available. Children also have many sources of support both within their families and the wider community to help them grow and develop a strong cultural identity. While grandparents and parents were most often reported as sources of support for children's cultural understanding, many children also received support from community members such as elders, teachers, and friends. This is important, as it is said that both families and broader communities play a critical role in language and cultural transmission (Norris, 2004). Encouragingly, almost all children (96.7%) in the RHS were reported to have at least one source of support in understanding their culture.

Culturally focused early childhood education programs such as Aboriginal Head Start can also support children's cultural learning. Findings here suggest that children who have attended an Aboriginal Head Start program are more likely to be able to speak or understand a First Nations language. While this is not necessarily a causal relationship,

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[24] Future research with the RHS data could undertake a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between different child care arrangements and other variables in the survey, including parental employment, family structure, and language knowledge.

language and culture are central to Aboriginal Head Start programs, and an evaluation of Head Start in urban and northern communities found that most Head Start centers use at least one Aboriginal language as a primary language of instruction (Aboriginal Head Start Initiative, 2000). Therefore it is plausible that the relationship found between Aboriginal Head Start attendance and a child's ability to speak or understand a First Nations language could be due to attending Aboriginal Head Start, though more research is needed.

While the RHS provides some information regarding the ELCC experiences and values of First Nations families, there is much that is not known. For example, there is no data available about the need for ELCC, families' expectations for ELCC, their preferences, factors that impact their decision-making process, or challenges finding and maintaining care arrangements. There is also a lack of information about families' satisfaction with the ELCC choices available to them, or with their ELCC providers. In addition to examining these areas, future research could shift the lens of analysis by taking into consideration how different family structures impact ELCC needs and preferences. Data such as this could help to inform appropriate policy and program responses.

The lack of information available to date has meant that ELCC policy and programming has tended to be based on research conducted with non-Indigenous populations. Two of the primary sources of data on ELCC experiences and preferences in Canada have been the National Child Care Survey conducted in the late 1980s, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth conducted through the 1990s to 2009. First Nations communities were excluded from the sampling frame of both surveys. More recently the federal government, in reporting on indicators of child well-being committed to under the 2000 Federal-Provincial/Territorial Communiqué on Early Childhood Development, used the Aboriginal Children's Survey to provide information on the early learning and care experiences of Aboriginal children (HRSDC, 2012). This survey, too, excluded First Nations families living on reserve.

Academic early learning research and evaluation studies have also largely excluded Indigenous families. In a review of early childhood research, Niles, Byers, and Krueger

(2007) found that Indigenous children were absent from even the largest and most well-known studies. This is especially problematic, they noted, because "many in the early childhood field remain committed to implementing early childhood programs with Indigenous communities based on these formal research studies and programs, even with limited or no evidence that Indigenous children would experience similar results" (Niles et al, 2007: 113). Both the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) have also drawn attention to this issue, noting that there is virtually no reliable data available on First Nations ELCC outcomes or experiences, or on how early childhood programs could best support First Nations families. (NWAC, 2005; CMEC, 2012).

A promising recent development has been the announcement of a new national survey being conducted by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). In 2011, FNIGC received a mandate from the AFN Chiefs in Assembly to conduct the First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (FNREEES).[25] One of the aims of the survey is to provide greater understanding of First Nations early childhood development issues and to support early childhood programming and policy development that reflects the needs and realities of First Nations communities. The survey is being conducted in 2013/2014 and preliminary results are expected to be delivered in 2015/2016.

In the meantime, there are a number of policy recommendations that First Nations advocates and allies have put forward since the 1980's that continue to apply today. These include that First Nations ELCC needs stable, adequate, long-term funding, that it be developed, delivered, and controlled by First Nations communities, that culture and language be central, and that it be holistic. The term "holistic" can mean a number of different things, but in this instance, holistic refers to ELCC that addresses the spirit, heart, mind, and body, that is for all children regardless of parental labour market status

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[25] The FNREEES is being funded by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), HRSDC, and Health Canada. The survey data will be owned by FNIGC (AANDC, 2012).

or income, and that is recognized as intimately interconnected to the entire learning continuum.

The policy analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates the danger of narrowly framing ELCC as a tool to enable parental labour force participation, a prevention initiative, a mechanism to promote equal opportunity for women, a way to support child development, or a means for transmitting culture and language to future generations. ELCC can serve all of these purposes. Treated as separate and distinct, these discourses compete for prominence resulting in a patchwork of often short-lived policies and programs with different missions and operating principles. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) pointed out, these distinctions are irrational and impede the creation of holistic policies and programs.

Based on the history and current direction of ELCC policy, it is clear that First Nations face a difficult policy environment. Jurisdictional issues between levels of government have resulted in very different ELCC landscapes across the country. For example, through the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement the provinces of Ontario and Alberta receive federal dollars for the provision of child care services on reserve, resulting in a much greater number of on-reserve child care spaces than in other provinces. At the same time, the Chiefs of Ontario (2013) maintain that the agreement is invalid as First Nations have never given up jurisdiction over the social well-being of their communities, and First Nations were not signatories in the agreement. In addition, some provinces are involved with regulating on-reserve child care, while others are not. Even within the federal level, there are multiple government departments operating independent ELCC initiatives. This complex web of overlapping jurisdictions, what Raham (2010) refers to as the "tangle of governance" (p. 1), inhibits the development of effective, coordinated policy approaches.

In addition, there is a tension between First Nations' forced dependency on the government for funding and the reality of being sovereign nations and desiring to assert that sovereignty. This tension is evident throughout First Nations – Canada relations, in which requests for support coincide with demands for autonomy. Kenny (2002) documented this tension in a study of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women's views on

policy, identifying the tension as a condition common to marginalized peoples and as a transition period on the journey to self-determination.

Compounding these on-going issues is the current government's stance on early learning and child care. The Conservative government has taken the approach that ELCC is a private responsibility and a matter of parental choice. Thus, since coming to power in 2006, federal ELCC initiatives have centred on providing monetary payments to parents. While existing First Nations ELCC programming such as Aboriginal Head Start and the First Nations Child Care Initiative have remained, funding has been stagnant. There is a clear lack of political will at the federal level to play a direct, active role in supporting integrated, holistic First Nations ELCC policy. At the same time, the absence of data available on the ELCC needs and experiences of First Nations families combined with recent cutbacks to the operating budgets of national First Nations organizations, who have historically taken a leadership role in advocating for ELCC policy, further intensifies the challenges faced within the policy environment. Nonetheless, there is hope that the upcoming First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey will provide much needed information that can be used to advocate for the design, delivery and funding of holistic, integrated First Nations ELCC policies and programming.

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Chapter 3

3 Standardized Testing and First Nations Schools: A Case Study

3.1 Introduction

Standardized testing is a highly contentious and hotly debated issue in education. Broadly defined, standardized tests are large-scale assessments that are uniformly administered and scored. In response to concerns about declining educational quality and the need to compete in the global economic arena, many countries have turned to standardized testing to lead education reform efforts. The rationale is that standardized testing can improve student learning by providing data that can be used to measure student performance, hold schools and districts accountable for results, and inform education policy and programming (NCLB Act, 2001; Popham et al, 1985; Phelps, 2005). Critics argue that using standardized testing to guide education reform is misguided at best, and at its worst has many negative consequences for students, teachers and schools (Haertel, 1999; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000). Further, some critics of reform have argued that the very concerns about declining educational quality and global competitiveness that have precipitated the reforms are a "manufactured crisis" (Berliner and Biddle, 1995, p. 127).

While there is a large body of research and commentary on the impact of standardized testing in public schools, far less attention has been paid to the effects of standardized testing on First Nations students and educational institutions. First Nations schools are unique in that they are tasked with providing all of the skills necessary to succeed in mainstream society, while also transmitting the culture and knowledge necessary to develop a strong First Nations identity.

In Canada, all of the provinces and territories have some form of standardized testing in literacy and mathematics in both elementary and secondary schools, though the grades tested and the content of the tests vary by province. With the exception of Alberta, on-

reserve, band-operated schools, which are under federal jurisdiction, are not required to participate in these tests; however, a number of schools have chosen to do so (Bell et al, 2004). Given the overwhelmingly negative academic literature regarding standardized testing and the harmful effects it has on students and teachers, this choice raises a number of questions about why First Nations schools may be choosing to administer provincial tests, what their experiences have been, and how these schools are balancing their role in providing a culturally relevant education with the administration of provincial standardized assessments.

First Nations peoples' right to education is enshrined in the treaties that the Crown and Indigenous peoples negotiated in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and is affirmed in the *Indian Act*. Under current practice, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) provides funding to First Nations communities for education, including the operation of schools on reserve.[26] Currently, there are approximately 520 federally funded First Nations schools on reserve in Canada. Of about 120,000 children of school age normally resident on reserve, approximately 70,000 (60%) attend school on reserve (AFN, 2010). The schools are locally controlled within each community, although many have joined together to develop regional management organizations for the delivery of higher-level services (Binda and Lall, 2013). AANDC mandates that each school will follow the relevant provincial curriculum and provincial education standards regarding teacher qualifications and graduation requirements (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). Further, in 2008 AANDC earmarked new education dollars for a proposal based program, the *First Nation Student Success Program* (FNSSP), which requires that provincial standardized assessments be administered. The program guidelines clearly state that "at a minimum, schools will participate in their respective provincial standard testing process" (INAC, 2008: 5). Thus,

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[26] AANDC was previously called the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC).

the federal government is now encouraging First Nations communities to implement provincial standardized assessment systems in their schools.[27]

Currently, there is a paucity of research on standardized testing in First Nations schools in Canada. As First Nations schools grapple with the decision of whether or not to participate in provincial assessment systems, it will be important to have a clear understanding of the risks and benefits involved. In this chapter, a case study of a First Nations school that uses the Ontario standardized exam, known as the Education, Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) exam, is presented to examine the impact of the use of externally developed testing on culturally based schooling. I ask, why might a First Nations school choose to implement a regional standardized assessment? How does this impact the schools' ability to provide a culturally based education? What challenges does a First Nations school face in implementing a standardized assessment? While this study presents only one school's experience, it can provide insight into the issues, benefits, and problems that can result from administering standardized testing in First Nations schools.

3.2 To Test or Not to Test: Criticisms and Defences of Standardized Testing

The expansion of standardized testing in elementary and secondary schools in the past two decades has set off a firestorm of debate about the quality and worth of such assessments and the accountability they impose. In this section I review both the criticisms and defences of standardized testing. While the academic literature on standardized testing is overwhelmingly negative, an effort is made to present a balanced view of the pros and cons of testing.

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[27] Under the FNSSP, funding is available to First Nations schools to implement school success plans, student learning assessments and performance measurement, with priority given to applications from regional First Nations organizations representing a group of First Nations schools.

3.2.1   Criticisms of Standardized Testing

3.2.1.1   Teaching to the Test

A common criticism of standardized testing is that it leads educators to teach to the test (Aydeniz and Southerland, 2012; Mehrens and Kaminski, 1989; Neil, 2003; Wright, 2002). One aspect of teaching to the test is the narrowing of curriculum, such that an excessive amount of time is spent preparing students in the subjects to be tested at the expense of subjects such as physical education, music, art, and social studies which are not typically tested on large-scale standardized assessments. A number of researchers have empirically examined this issue. In a survey of about 360 teachers in the United States conducted by Shepard and Dougherty (1991), about half of teachers reported giving less emphasis to subjects that were not tested, and teachers in a study conducted by Wright (2002) reported that high-stakes testing had turned teaching to the test into an all-day endeavour, with little to no time available for art, music, or physical education.

Even within subjects such as math, Smith (1991) found that elementary school teachers tended to emphasize simple operations that were known to be on the test, neglecting to cover more complex topics that would not be tested. Thus, critics assert that standardized testing leads teachers to drill students on basic skills and facts at the expense of broader learning and higher order thinking, as standardized tests tend to emphasize basic-knowledge questions that can be measured easily (Wright, 2002; Jones et al, 1999). Critical thinking, problem solving skills, and creativity are said to fall by the wayside.

Teaching to the test also creates problems for making inferences from test results. Popham (2001) argues that standardized assessments are meant to test a sample of the knowledge or skills that students should be learning in school; tests should not be defining the curriculum in its entirety. When the content of the test begins to define the curriculum, inferences about students' general knowledge and skills from test results can no longer be made (Popham, 2001). Inferences from standardized tests are also limited by what has been termed 'test pollution'. Test pollution refers to factors that affect test performance "without connection to the construct represented by the test" (Haladyna, Nolen, and Haas, 1991: 4). Generally, test pollution denotes inappropriate or unethical

test preparation of students. Examples of this are administering past exams to students as 'practice exams', dismissing low-achieving students from taking the test, and providing hints to students during the test (Haladyna, Nolen, and Haas, 1991). It is argued that under these circumstances, students learn how to perform well on standardized tests without necessarily understanding the material. Under these conditions, increases in test scores often do not reflect improved learning, and the inferences that can be made from students' test scores are minimal (Sacks, 1999; Urdan and Paris, 1994).

3.2.1.2   Negative Psychological Effects

Standardized tests, it is argued, are a significant source of stress and anxiety for students. Generally, students are labelled as "high-anxiety" in the literature if they report emotional discomfort, excessive worrying, unfavourable comparisons with other students, and negative beliefs about their ability in relation to test-taking[28] (McDonald, 2001; Hill and Wigfield, 1984; Reay and Williams, 1999). Nottlemann and Hill (1977) estimated that test anxiety is a problem for about 25% to 30% of students, while Reay and Williams (1999), who conducted interviews and focus groups with a class ten to eleven year olds in London, England, found that all of the students they interviewed experienced fear and anxiety in relation to the British National Curriculum tests. Triplett and Barksdale (2005) conducted drawing and writing exercises with 225 American elementary school students, concluding that the children overwhelmingly experienced negative emotions in relation to high-stakes testing. However, Mulvenon, Stegman and Ritter (2005) argued that the prevalence of test anxiety is overstated, and that it is often misrepresented in the literature.

Test anxiety has also been linked to performance, with high-anxiety students performing more poorly on standardized tests than others (Hill and Wigfield, 1984). Kohn (2000) argued that for many students, their anxiety in the testing environment prevents them from demonstrating their understanding of the material; therefore their scores do not

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[28] For a detailed discussion about the measurement of test anxiety see Wigfield and Eccles (1989).

reflect their actual knowledge. The higher the stakes attached to the test, the greater the stress for test-takers. Thus, high-stakes tests are argued to set anxious students up to fail (Kohn, 2000).

In addition to the anxiety that the act of test-taking can induce, poor performance on standardized tests is argued to lower students' self-esteem and can cause students to doubt their own ability. Based on interviews with students, Leonard and Davey (as cited in Harlen and Crick, 2003) and Kearns (2011) both found that students who received poor standardized test scores experienced a decrease in their self-esteem and began to question their own abilities. These negative self-perceptions are argued to decrease student motivation to learn, which can lead to increased drop-out rates (Kohn, 2000; Sacks, 1999). However, few empirical studies have assessed the relationship between drop-out rates and standardized testing. Those who have have focused almost exclusively on the impact of minimum competency testing required to graduate from high school, and the findings of these studies have been inconsistent (Jacob, 2001; Griffin and Heidorn, 1996).[29]

Standardized testing is also said to have adverse psychological effects on teachers, particularly when there are high stakes attached. In a qualitative study of the effects of mandated standardized testing on teachers in Arizona, Smith (1991) found that teachers experienced anxiety, stress, embarrassment, guilt, and anger in relation to the publication of test results and felt pressure from school administration to continually raise scores. Jones et al. (1999), in a survey of 470 teachers in North Carolina, found that 77% of teachers felt that morale was lower and 76% reported that their jobs were more stressful than before the introduction of high-stakes standardized testing. In a longitudinal study of fourth and fifth-grade teachers, Valli and Buese (2007) also found that teachers experienced high stress levels due to the high-stakes demands of the state standardized testing. Numerous authors have pointed out that these negative feelings can hinder

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[29] Jacob (2001) found that there was a relationship between standardized graduate tests and drop-out rates while Griffin and Heidorn (1996) found that there was not.

teachers' job performance, and there is concern that the increased stress and frustration could lead many teachers to leave the teaching profession (Jones et al, 1999; Kohn, 2000; Nieto, 2009; Santoro, 2011; Stiggins, 1999; Valli and Buese, 2007).

3.2.1.3   Improper Comparisons

The comparisons across schools that often accompany standardized testing are also seen as problematic (Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2003a; Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2003b; FairTest, 1995, Forbes, 2000: Fox, 2001). This is because studies have shown that as much as 70% of the variation in student test scores is due to factors beyond a school's control, such as student, family, and community level factors (Ungerleider, 2006). For example, a school located in a low-income neighbourhood may have innovative, positive teaching strategies but appear to be performing poorly when ranked against schools in higher-income neighbourhoods. Different schools have different human and financial resources available to them, and public comparisons and rankings of schools based on standardized test scores generally ignore these factors.[30]

There is also a fear that test scores and rankings will be inappropriately used by parents to decide where to send their children. School rankings are strongly advocated for by proponents of free-market approaches to education based on parental school choice (Hepburn, 1999; Guillemette, 2007). The argument is that parents should be able to make an informed decision about where to send their children, and to do this they need to have access to information about school performance. This is said to then promote competition among schools to improve the quality of education in order to attract students and the funding that comes with them. When standardized test scores are used for this purpose, without taking into consideration factors such as the socioeconomic characteristics of the school, schools with lower income students may appear to be of poorer quality. Parents with the resources to move their child to a 'higher ranked' school will then be able to do so. Given that parental resources are linked to educational attainment, this could also

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[30] One exception to this is rankings produced by Johnson (2005; 2008) that incorporated socioeconomic status into the ranking methodology.

mean a drain of higher performing children from the school, leading to further reductions in the school's test scores regardless of increased investments or innovative teaching methods being employed at the school. Those without the resources to move their child will remain in the lower-performing school which will see its funding continually shrink as students with the means to do so leave (Froese-Germain, 1999).

3.2.1.4   Serving a Neo-liberal Agenda

Standardized testing is also criticized for being part of a neo-liberal shift in education policy towards individualizing social problems, emphasizing fiscal responsibility, and paving the way for free-market approaches to education based on school choice. Lipman (2006) ties the current emphasis in the United States on high-stakes testing to neo-liberalism and post-9/11 politics in which surveillance and repression are normalized. Standardized testing is seen as a means of intense monitoring, and the types of questions it asks and ways of thinking it promotes are said to stifle critical debate and dialogue. Lipman also argues that standardized testing in the United States, with the publication of test results and the designation of schools as 'failing' or 'successful', serves to increase competition among individuals and schools and pits groups against each other as blame for failure is shifted among teachers, students, parents and schools. This is said to breed mistrust among citizens, and undermine social solidarity and the possibility of collective action.

In a similar line of argument, Graham and Neu (2004) produced a genealogy of testing in Alberta to show how standardized testing is part of a larger programme of constructing governable persons. Drawing on Foucault's work on governmentality and the 'panoptic modality of power' they argue that standardized examinations discipline not only the students, but also teachers, parents, principals, and administrators. This is done in part through making test results highly visible, which leads the subjects of the measurement to internalize the classification systems, self-regulate, and adjust their behaviour in order to conform to group norms. Thus, standardized tests are understood as a means of control and a means of producing docile bodies.

For Apple (2006), standardized testing is the first step towards the marketization of education, as testing provides the comparative data essential for 'consumers' to make decisions in an education marketplace. School and district level test scores allow parents to compare school performance and move their children accordingly, turning education into a commodity that can be bought and sold. Raw test scores ignore variations in student composition, and are based on an assumption that scores are a valid and reliable barometer of a school's quality. Apple further links standardized testing to the increased presence of private corporations in the education field. In the United States, education is a $700 billion sector, making it an appealing source of potential profits. Standardized testing opens up new avenues for private corporations to influence education, it is argued, as corporations are often relied upon to develop the testing instruments. When high stakes are attached to testing the profit potential for corporations is increased further, as schools feel pressured to purchase new services and products to improve their test scores.

3.2.1.5 Cultural and Language Bias

The relationship between test scores and student characteristics, such as class, ethnicity, and language, is the focus of much criticism of testing in the literature. Scholars and practitioners have contended that standardized testing is fundamentally biased against low socioeconomic status and minority students (Altshuler and Schmautz, 2006; Bordeaux, 1995; Deyhle, 1986; Froese-Germain, 1999; Kohn, 2000; Sacks, 1999). Standardized tests, it is argued, are not objective and value-free; tests are designed and validated against white, middle class cultural values and experiences (Green and Griffore, 1980). Shields (1997) provides an example of how test items can be culturally biased, citing a test question focusing on family relationships that stated "Who is the son of your aunt?", with uncle, cousin and brother given as options. According to dominant Anglo-European norms 'cousin' is the correct answer, but Navajo fifth graders all selected 'brother', which is the term used to refer to all relatives of the same generation. As a further example, a school official in Alberta noted that the provincial achievement tests often make reference to objects or concepts, such as an escalator or the size of a city block, that are unfamiliar to many First Nations students who are living in remote areas (Goddard, 2002). Thus, it is argued that success on standardized tests often assumes, and

requires, knowledge of white, middle class culture, disadvantaging those of other socioeconomic and ethnic/cultural groups.

Different learning styles may also impact a student's ability to perform well on a standardized test. Standardized tests with a common format and time limit can ignore differences among students who may not all learn and recall knowledge in the same way, or at the same speed (Sacks, 1999). As Marks and Coll (2007) and Pewewardy (2002) have noted, many Indigenous students have more observational and visual learning styles. Thus, paper and pencil tests that fragment knowledge into multiple-choice questions may be incompatible with the learning styles of many First Nations students.

Language skills are also correlated with test outcomes (Brescia and Fortune, 1988; Tremblay, Ross and Berthelot, 2001). Students for whom English is not their first language, or who speak a different dialect, are known to be at a disadvantage in standardized tests conducted in Standard English (Fox and LaFontaine, 1995). While certain test questions may be designed to assess English language proficiency, language too often plays a role in the ability of linguistic minority students to interpret and answer correctly test questions that are designed to assess other content areas (O'Connor, 1989).

For First Nations students, the cultural and language biases inherent in standardized tests that are designed for use in "mainstream" educational institutions can result in poor test scores regardless of the students' level of knowledge of the core concepts and ideas being tested. This raises the concern that First Nations students may score lower on provincial standardized tests due to cultural mismatch rather than a lack of knowledge or basic skills.

3.2.1.6   Stereotype threat

The concept of stereotype threat has been used by Steele and Aronson (1995) to explore the effect that negative stereotypes about a group's intellectual capacity has on their test-taking performance. Focusing on African American students specifically, they argued that the fear of fulfilling negative stereotypes disrupts African American students' ability to perform well on standardized tests that they understand to be a measure of their

intelligence or aptitude. Schmader and Johns (2003) have shown that stereotype threat impairs performance in part by reducing individuals' working memory capacity. That is, it is argued that negative stereotypes place an extra burden on the cognitive resources of an individual, impairing their performance.

A number of empirical studies have demonstrated support for stereotype threat theory. For example, African American students have been shown to perform more poorly than Caucasian peers on a task when it is described as being a test of their intellectual ability, but they perform equally when the same task is said to be unrelated to intelligence (Steele and Aronson,1995). White men have been found to perform worse on a math test when they are led to believe that they will be compared with Asian men (Aronson et al, 1999). While the issue of stereotype threat has not been examined in relation to Indigenous students in Canada, it is reasonable to believe that it could have a similar negative impact as for African American students. Thus, stereotype threat could be a further possible source of bias in First Nations students' standardized test scores.

3.2.1.7   Assimilation and Forced Integration

A final concern to be discussed is assimilation and forced integration. This is a complex issue. The existence of a test that is common across large populations implies that the content of the test has been taught, and there is pressure to conform to the dominant methods of teaching (Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2003b). This has implications for the use of schools to maintain cultures and traditions among First Nations peoples, as well as for First Nations' control of education (Bordeaux, 1995; Castagno and Brayboy, 2008). First Nations have been fighting for full control of education for decades, and any mandated external assessment system could certainly be seen as interfering with their right to self-determination. Further theoretical consideration of this issue is needed, as there has been little to no discussion of the implications of using provincial standardized tests in First Nations communities in relation to autonomy and self-determination.

3.2.2   Defences of Standardized Testing

While the academic literature on standardized testing has been overwhelmingly negative, various defences of standardized testing have been made. A prominent proponent of standardized testing, Richard Phelps (2009), has argued that critics ignore a large body of evidence that demonstrates the utility of standardized assessments. These studies, Phelps argues, show how well designed standardized tests can be used effectively by teachers, parents, and school administrators to improve the education of students. The following are four commonly cited positive uses of standardized testing that have some applicability to First Nations communities. It should be noted, however, that there is very little literature available that directly addresses the question of benefits for First Nations students.

3.2.2.1   Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

According to testing proponents, standardized testing can be used as a diagnostic tool. Test results can point out areas where districts, schools, or classes are doing particularly well. Promising practices that contribute to success in the content area can then be identified and disseminated widely. Testing can also point to areas where districts, schools, or classes are not achieving the desired results, identifying a problem to be addressed. But as Buly and Valencia (2002) have shown, a failing score on a standardized test can be due to many different underlying reasons. Therefore, it is important that the test score not be seen as the answer, but as an indicator of an issue that needs to be further explored.

Standardized tests can also be used as a diagnostic tool at the individual level. Rudman (1987) noted that while the information available from standardized tests is obviously limited, coupled with data from other sources, such as teachers' independent assessments, tests can provide useful information to help teachers determine specific areas where students may require extra assistance. Thus, key factors in the ability of standardized tests to be used as an effective diagnostic tool are that the test content reflect school curriculum, that teachers have a clear understanding of how to interpret and use test

results, and that the limitations and the value of the results are widely understood by administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Rudman, 1987).

3.2.2.2 Motivate and Measure Change

Building on the use of testing as a diagnostic tool, once a diagnosis has been made test data can be used to motivate and measure change. In a study of the use of Ontario provincial standardized exams, Wideman (2002) showed that when teachers are encouraged to use test results as data to inform their own practice, the tests come to be understood as a strong catalyst for change. While teachers in the study initially saw test results as 'unfriendly data', through the process of engaging with the results and using them to raise questions about their practice, they began to see provincial testing as a valuable tool to improve their teaching methods and improve learning outcomes among their students. Indeed, comparison of provincial test results with the previous year showed that for teachers participating in the study, student outcomes had substantially improved and the improvements exceeded averages for the school board.

Testing can be used to track trends over time, at the individual, school, regional or national levels. Cizek (2001) argues that this data can then be used to refine education programming and policy and identify successful strategies. For example, school districts and teachers may realize that a particular approach is not working and they need to try something new, or that a special program may be needed for students who are having a particularly difficult time with the material. Standardized tests were used for this purpose at Albert Bay Elementary School in British Columbia, which is a public school with a large Indigenous population (Bell et al, 2004). Teachers at this school used standardized tests to track student growth over time, as well as to track the effectiveness of various programs and teaching methods. This can be particularly useful in contexts where resources are scarce and there is a need to ensure that they are being used effectively. This is examined below.

Proponents assert that standardized testing can also motivate students and encourage parental involvement. According to Natriello and Dornbusch (1984), when students are

held to higher standards through testing it generally leads to higher class attendance and increased student effort. A similar conclusion was reached by Roderick and Engel (2001) in a study of the impact of high-stakes testing on student motivation in Chicago public schools. Students in their study reported greater educational work effort since the implementation of the testing, which was confirmed by teacher reports. Bishop (1995) found that external examinations can challenge students to do their best and encourage them to become more actively engaged in the learning process. Bishop also observed that in Canadian provinces with examination systems parents were more likely to talk with their child about what they were learning in school.

It has been cautioned, however, that for test data to be used effectively, educators need to develop their "assessment literacy" (Campbell and Levin, 2009). Understanding how to access, analyze and apply data is a necessary prerequisite to using test data for improving educational instruction and programming. Earl and Katz (2006) have shown that scepticism about data among teachers is often due to mistrust or fear of evaluation and a lack of training. Capacity building is vital, advocates argue, if standardized testing is going to be a useful educational tool.

3.2.2.3   Supplemental Resource Allocation

Resource allocation is a more controversial use for standardized testing, and ideas and models of how this can occur vary. For example, Popham (2001) suggests that testing data can be used to allocate supplemental resources to low-performing schools for professional development, new educational materials, or for the development of educational programs to improve performance. This could be useful for First Nations schools, which are chronically underfunded, to highlight the need for greater financial resources (AFN, 2006; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011).[31]

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[31] Current funding for First Nations schools is grossly inadequate. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has stated that First Nations are currently facing an education funding crisis which is hindering meaningful progress from being made in improving education outcomes for Aboriginal students. Since 1996 there has been a 2% funding cap on AANDC's national education funding formula. The AFN estimates that due to inflation and population growth, an annual increase of at least 6.3% has been needed over this period

Alternatively, supplemental funding could be allocated to those schools that show improvement as an incentive for further improved performance. This method, however, is likely to be fraught with many of the problems of high-stakes testing discussed earlier, such as creating excessive pressure on students and teachers to raise scores, promoting teaching to the test, and withholding funds from those schools that are most in need of additional resources.

3.2.2.4 Provide Basic Data about First Nations' Education and Promote Dialogue

Regarding Indigenous education in particular, some First Nations groups in Canada have argued that standardized testing results can help to provide basic data about how First Nations students are faring in order to promote dialogue and action. The argument is that there is a serious lack of data on First Nations students' educational performance, that this is in part because First Nations schools are not given the resources to administer widespread assessment, and that this is a significant concern because it limits chances for critical dialogue. The Northern Aboriginal Education Circle (2003), a group of educators in provincial and First Nations schools in Northern Ontario, encouraged First Nations schools in Ontario to participate in provincial testing so that educators could establish a baseline of how students are performing, targets could be set for improvements, and schools that were doing well could share promising practices. Increasing data gathering, analysis, and setting targets for improvement was one of four key goals of the group's work plan. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has also identified information gathering and analysis as a key requirement needed to improve First Nations' education. Without this information, they argue that First Nations are at a disadvantage in terms of identifying successes and failure and improving educational practices (AFN, 2005).

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resulting in a cumulative funding shortfall of $3 billion (AFN, 2012). The Auditor General (2004) has also called attention to the inadequacy of current funding arrangements, pointing out that the funding formula currently used to allocate core funding to band-operated schools has not been updated since it was created in the 1980s.

One of the strongest advocates of the use of assessment systems for improving Aboriginal education has been Nathan Matthew of the North Thompson Indian Band in British Columbia. Matthew believes that the data provided by standardized testing can be a valuable tool in communicating needs to government bodies, educational authorities, parents and the public (Bell et al, 2004). He has argued that only in knowing how students are faring in different areas can meaningful dialogue about improving education for First Nations students take place (Bell et al, 2004).

3.3 Standardized Testing and Indigenous Schools: The United States Experience

In the United States, the federal government has a trust relationship in American Indian and Alaska Native education that has been formalized through legislation and court decisions. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) is the federal body responsible for Indigenous education. There are currently 183 BIE funded elementary and secondary schools across 23 states serving 49,100 students, 126 of which are tribally controlled with the remaining 57 operated by the BIE (Bureau of Indian Education, 2012c).

Over the past few decades, the United States has been moving increasingly towards the use of testing as an accountability mechanism, an assessment of student, school, district and state performance, and a way of standardizing school curriculum. Through the *Goals 2000: The Educate America Act* (1994) and the *Improving America's Schools Act* (1994), states were required to implement new content standards and assessment systems. In 2001, the standardized testing regime was strengthened with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) that mandated the administration of standardized tests in reading, math, and science in all states. Previously, states often administered different tests to students who performed at a lower level. A key change under this Act was that all students within a state, including students in the 184 BIE administered schools now took the same test. States must submit assessment plans and results to the secretary of education and annual report cards for individual districts and schools are released to the public.

Initially the BIE was to develop its own assessment system and targets, but this was later revised so that Bureau schools must now adopt their state's standards. This was done because when the requirement for new assessment systems was first mandated under the Goals 2000 Act, most Bureau schools chose to adopt the standards of the state in which they were located rather than the curriculum, standards, and assessment systems being established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Individual tribal school boards could develop alternative progress standards, but these had to be approved by the Secretary of Education (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2005). In 2011, the Department of Education announced that state educational agencies could request flexibility related to specific provisions of NCLB in exchange for "rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction" (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). In 2012 the BIE submitted an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility request to the Department of Education outlining a plan for a unified accountability system for all BIE schools (Bureau of Indian Education, 2012c). As of October 2013, the request was still under review.

While there are relatively few studies that reliably assess the impact of standardized testing under NCLB specifically for American Indian and Alaska Native students, a few published studies offer insights. Patrick (2008) conducted a case study of the pseudonymous Warrior Elementary School, a primarily Navajo school, examining the impact of NCLB legislation on the school community. Warrior Elementary School had not met the mandated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three consecutive years and was facing school closure or restructuring in which all teachers would lose their positions. This created immense stress for teachers and it led to high teacher turnover. Patrick also found that in an effort to meet the state requirements, teachers had resorted to assimilationist teaching practices, focusing on test preparation at the expense of language and cultural programming.

Garcia (2008) analyzed state-level achievement data in Arizona to compare the achievement rates of American Indian students with other groups of students prior to and

since the introduction of NCLB. He reported mixed results. The scores of American Indian students improved under NCLB, but he attributed most of this progress to a one-time change in the assessments that was accompanied by a large spike in test scores. He also found that the gap in performance between American Indian and White students had widened in some grades and subjects since NCLB (grade 8 mathematics and grade 3 reading) but had been closing in others (grade 5 mathematics and grade 8 reading).

In a five-year, multi-site study of Native American language programs the finding was clearer that NCLB was curtailing the ability of schools to provide Native American language instruction. One school in particular had implemented a bilingual, bicultural literacy program and had shown improvements in both English and Native American language proficiency. After failing to meet AYP, the school's bilingual program funding ended and the school had to implement an NCLB-mandated English phonics program (Romero-Little et al, 2007). Further, the researchers reported that standardized test scores actually declined post-NCLB (McCarty, 2009; Romero-Little et al, 2007).

While lack of resources and strict timelines have prevented many tribal schools from developing their own culturally relevant assessment systems, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) was the American pioneer in implementing cultural standards alongside academic content standards. Developed prior to the implementation of NCLB, the cultural standards provide a way for schools to assess the extent to which they are meeting the cultural needs of students as well as preparing these students to be competitive in mainstream society. The standards have been widely commended for being comprehensive, democratic, and locally adaptive (Battiste, 2002; Castagno and Brayboy, 2008).

The most wide-ranging report on the impact of NCLB on American Indian and Alaska Native students and educators was produced by the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) (Beaulieu, Sparks and Alonzo 2005). In a series of hearings and consultation sessions involving American Indian and Alaska Native educators, administrators, leaders, parents and students, the majority of witnesses believed that greater accountability among schools and districts was a positive aspect of the NCLB, but

they did not believe that the legislation was having the desired effect. Many felt that the legislation was actually leaving American Indian children behind. A key problem was that mandated assessment was not accompanied with adequate funding. This meant that districts and schools may have poor testing scores, but were not provided with the resources to improve performance (Beaulieu, Sparks and Alonzo 2005). The under-funding also led schools to focus their existing resources on teaching to the test at the expense of liberal arts and Native American language and cultural programming.

Witnesses also described how the high stakes attached to assessment results and the pressure to achieve the mandated AYP had created a climate in which students and teachers felt blamed for poor results, leading to higher dropout rates and higher teacher turnover. Concern was voiced regarding the focus on annual school results, as opposed to individual student improvement. Finally, many argued that the NCLB is far too rigid and was constructed without consultation with Native American peoples (Beaulieu, Sparks and Alonzo 2005).

One positive result of NCLB discussed in this report was the availability of data on the performance of Native American students (Beaulieu, Sparks and Alonzo 2005). Under NCLB, the BIE must now publish a Bureau-wide annual report card and individual report cards for each BIE school that provide detailed information on student performance, including test results for language arts, reading and mathematics, and average daily attendance rates, graduation rates and dropout rates. The student data is broken down by gender and by Special Education and Limited English Proficiency groups. Data on educators is also provided, such as the number of teachers, teacher turn-over, average school principal tenure, and the number of core area teachers who incorporate culture or language into classes.

The assessment data summarized in the BIE Report Cards show that there has been no improvement in the scores of American Indian and Alaska Native children since NCLB was introduced. In the eight years from the 2003/2004 school year (the first year in which the majority of BIE schools used state assessment systems) to the 2010/2011 school year, the number of students performing at the Proficient or Advanced levels in the Language

Arts dropped from 47.2% to 35.5% and there were negligible changes in both reading and mathematics (38.4% to 41.4% and 34.8% to 32.8%, respectively) (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2005; Bureau of Indian Education, 2012a). Scoring below Proficient level is considered failing. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data also shows a lack of improvement since 2000 (NCES, 2012). In addition, 83 out of 184 BIE funded schools, or 45.1% of the total, were under "restructuring" status in the 2010/2011 school year (Bureau of Indian Education, 2012b). Restructuring, the most severe consequence outlined in NCLB, requires that schools choose one of five options: reopen as a public charter school, replace school staff and administration, contract an external agency to operate the school, turn over operations of the school to the state, or carry out another form of major restructuring.

The high-stakes testing regime ushered in by NCLB has been widely criticized in the context of *all* schools, but it provides additional insight into the dangers of mandated, high-stakes assessment systems for Indigenous schools. The practices of publishing individual school test results, mandating specific increases in achievement, expecting large results in a short amount of time, and tying results to high-stakes penalties are seen by many to be having inordinate negative consequences for Indigenous schools in the United States. Further, compulsory testing coupled with inadequate funding has challenged the ability of BIE schools to support cultural and special needs programs, sacrificing crucial dimensions of quality education for First Nations students. Lack of resources and strict timelines have also prevented tribal schools from developing their own culturally relevant assessment systems, undermining tribal sovereignty. Thus, the United States experience raises many important concerns that need to be taken into consideration in the Canadian context.

3.4   Methodology

This research was conducted in partnership with the Board of Education of a First Nation community in Ontario. My supervisor and I traveled to the community to meet with the Board of Education multiple times, and when the research was complete we provided the material and analysis to the community and presented the research at a

community symposium. Ethics approval for this project was received from the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board. A case study approach was taken to examine administrator and teacher perceptions of the impact of administering an externally developed standardized assessment in a First Nations school. The aim was to understand some of the various reasons why a First Nations school may choose to implement a standardized assessment as well as to gain insight into whether and how the use of the testing affects student learning, teacher instruction, and culturally relevant schooling.

3.4.1   The Setting

The First Nation school at the center of this study is located in Ontario. The school serves a community of over 2,000 people and has junior kindergarten to grade 8. Like many First Nation communities in Canada, students attend high school outside of the community. The school is community controlled, with its own Board of Education, and is funded by AANDC.

The EQAO assessment was first implemented in this school in the mid-2000s. When implemented, the administration gave little advance notice to teachers, students and parents, and there was no information or professional development provided on the purpose of the testing and how and why it was being used. The administration that introduced the test was let go before the test results came in the following September, and the new administration decided to continue to use the assessment.

3.4.2   Participants

Teachers of grades 2 through 8, the language teacher, resource teachers, and school administrators were invited to participate in the study. All of the teachers but one agreed to be interviewed and one of the school administrators was away from work and was unable to participate. Five of the participants were male and eight were female. Approximately half of the interview participants identified as First Nations. The majority of the respondents had experience with administering the EQAO testing, while for a few EQAO was relatively new and unknown. To protect the anonymity of the participants,

all, including the administrator, will be referred to as "teacher." While the study would be strengthened by identifying the gender, ethnicity, years of experience, and grade taught, respecting confidentiality and the privacy of the participants is of utmost importance and was an element of our agreement with the community.

3.4.3   Methods

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with the 12 teachers and one school administrator in April 2008. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted in a private room in the school during school hours. A supply teacher was provided to the school to cover each teacher's classroom while they were being interviewed. The interview guide included questions about the cultural appropriateness of the tests, whether and how the EQAO exams had influenced classroom instruction, how students respond to the testing, what happens at the school when test scores are released, as well as a broad, open-ended questions about the teachers' overall impression of the impact of the testing on the school and on student learning.

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Transcribed interviews were mailed to participants to give participants the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the transcript and to add or clarify any points. The verified interview transcripts were then analyzed by coding interview data into relatively open categories, progressively building more specific coding schemes and eventually developing more selective categories, showing the relations among categories, and validating the relationships with the data. Care was taken to maintain the diversity of opinions and views offered while finding points of convergence and overarching themes. The findings are grouped below into four broad areas: 1) Assessing common criticisms of standardized testing; 2) Benefits of administering EQAO; 3) Challenges for First Nations schools; and, 4) Teachers' suggestions.

3.5 Findings

3.5.1 Assessing Common Criticisms of Standardized Testing

Teachers interviewed were familiar with the common criticisms of standardized testing and had clearly thought about many of the issues before being asked in the interview setting. Below, teachers' responses to, and feelings about, three of the common criticisms of standardized testing are outlined: teaching to the test, emotional distress, and cultural bias.

3.5.1.1 Teaching to the Test

Teaching to the test generally refers to spending a disproportionate amount of classroom time focusing on the subjects and content that will be covered on the exam at the expense of other areas and using the format of the test as a model for teaching. In the case of the EQAO exams, the subjects tested are reading, writing, and math, and questions are generally in multiple choice and short answer format.

Teachers interviewed noted that since implementing EQAO, learning had become more integrated in that basic skill development was included in all subject areas. For example, many teachers discussed working to include reading and writing strategies in subject areas such as science, social studies and drama. In this way, some teachers argued that teaching to the test was not an issue as instruction time on non-tested areas did not decrease. However, the majority of teachers stated that a concern for doing well on the testing and the need to cover a lot of curriculum before administering the test necessarily leads to an increased focus on the subjects and subject content that they know will be covered on the exam. This was particularly the case in grade 3 and 6 classrooms, where teachers felt pressure to ensure that the curriculum content included on the test had been fully covered in class prior to the administration of the exam in May.

While literacy and mathematics were seen as important subjects, focusing on them to the exclusion of areas such as science, social studies, drama, music, and art was argued to take away from the fun, creative elements of schooling and to be particularly disadvantageous for students who excel in these areas. As one teacher stated:

That's the fun of school and sometimes that's the only level playing field that some kids have is to be, you know, if they are good in art, they just feel so proud that they can do something better than anyone else in the class. And a lot of times it's the ones that are lower levels of EQAO, they are struggling in school and this is where they excel and we are almost taking it away or discounting its importance.

The majority of teachers felt that there needed to be more balance in the amount of classroom time spent on different subject areas, though it was clear that the reality of the testing for grade 3 and grade 6 teachers made this a difficult task.

3.5.1.2   Testing and Emotional Distress

Standardized tests are often argued to be a significant source of stress and anxiety for both teachers and students. For the teachers interviewed who had observed students taking the EQAO exams, most noted that some students would become upset and anxious before and while writing the test. However, many teachers pointed out that this was not specific to the EQAO exam, but that some students would experience test anxiety due to a math, language, or science test as well. That is, some students will experience nervousness and anxiety regardless of the type of test being administered. The degree of emotional distress experienced by students often has more to do with how the test is framed and explained than due to the actual content of the test itself. One teacher explained:

I really focus on making it as stress free as possible, as far as building up to it. It is like 'aw, guys it's just an hour in the morning and then we are going to have fun the rest of the day'. And they don't get that stressed out about it, building up to the tests. There is definitely nervousness but I think that's always going to be there, but I try and really actively attempt to diffuse it as well as I can, to make it no big deal.

Teachers felt that not making a 'big deal' out of the test could help to reduce students' stress and nervousness. Further, some noted that ensuring students were well prepared and understood the purpose of the test was also important to easing anxiety and making the experience as minimally stressful as possible.

In terms of the anxiety that standardized testing creates for teachers, the teachers who taught grades in which the testing is administered found testing to be a very stressful time. While they appreciated that the testing had recently been relabeled the 'primary test' and 'junior test' as opposed to the 'grade 3 test' and 'grade 6 test' in recognition that preparing students was a collaborative effort, they still experienced stress and pressure in their desire for their students to succeed. Positively, none of the teachers administering the testing felt external pressure from administration, the board, or other teachers to improve students' scores and did not feel that they would face negative repercussions if the test results were poor. Rather, many teachers noted that the school worked as a whole to develop strategies to improve on areas where test results showed weakness, as opposed to promoting test taking strategies or encouraging teachers to teach to the test.

3.5.1.3   Test Format and Questions: Culturally Biased?

Teachers had mixed views about the cultural appropriateness of EQAO exams for their students. While some felt that recent improvements in the test had removed any concern about cultural bias, others stated that the wording of certain questions and the format of the test itself can sometimes disadvantage First Nations learners. Test questions deemed to be problematic were those that involved references to aspects of urban living, such as riding a subway, reading a bus schedule, or walking down a sidewalk, as well as questions that included ethnically diverse names. Students can often get stuck on these questions, and given that teachers are not allowed to offer any assistance (for example, a teacher would not be able to tell the student that the unfamiliar word is a name) the student can lose time or answer a question incorrectly because of a trivial element of the test question. However, almost all teachers who talked about biased test questions pointed out that this was not solely a concern for First Nations students, but was more of a socioeconomic or urban/rural issue. It was also noted that there are typically only a couple of problematic questions in any given year, and that test bias such as this does not unduly influence test results.

In terms of the format of the exam itself, concerns were raised that the way in which the test is administered conflicted with the style of teaching that is currently being encouraged. One teacher articulated this particularly well:

> *My big problem with EQAO is the fact that good teaching practice these days is group experience. Kids working to explore, find answers, critical thinking, working with everything from whole groups, to pairs, triads, these sorts of things. And when EQAO rolls around, it is, ok, everybody at their own desk, dividers, no one is allowed to talk, no one is allowed to discuss anything. The test goes against everything we are being taught on how to teach these guys. It's the exact opposite style of what we are doing on a daily basis.*

Thus, there is seen to be a large disconnect between current "best practice" teaching methods and the format of the EQAO assessment. It was also noted that First Nations students often demonstrate their knowledge better in hands-on activities and by exploring and finding answers as opposed to the paper and pencil format of EQAO. Participants did not see any clear solutions to these issues, as many acknowledged that it would be difficult to administer a standardized exam that reflected the current teaching practice of using group work and that involved more hand-on activities.

It is important to note that even participants who felt that there was some cultural bias in the EQAO assessments did not feel that the testing should be stopped for this reason or that it was creating cultural bias in their teaching practices. While the core content that is taught in classrooms may need to be similar to the public school system due to the testing, the way in which the content is taught can and needs to be culturally relevant:

> *So a lot of people don't understand the importance or results of that standardized test and they think, oh that's just a biased test, and our kids don't need to know that. Well, they are not going to learn the same way, they are not going to learn the information the same way as everybody else, I'm going to teach it to them in a way they understand it . . . using the strategies that they are comfortable with to get them up to the next level. And I think a lot of parents, and maybe some teachers I guess, think well that's not for our students. We don't need to do that. I think we need to do it, we are just going to do it in a different way to get there.*

Administering a standardized exam presupposes that certain curricular content has been taught. However, as this teacher suggested, the testing does not have to determine how students are taught this content on a day to day basis. Teachers can adapt the curriculum and teach it in a way that is appropriate for their students.

One idea that had been suggested was to develop a test specifically for First Nations students. When participants were asked whether this would be a positive development, responses were mixed. A few teachers did not want a test devised specifically for First Nations, noting the great cultural diversity among First Nations themselves, as well as a concern that parents may see it as a second rate test. However, about half of the participants felt that the possibility of creating a test specifically for First Nations schools that would better reflect their students' cultural backgrounds should be explored. At the time, the school did not have the resources necessary to create and administer their own standardized assessment that is personalized to their student community.

3.5.2   Benefits of Testing

Over the course of the interviews, many positive aspects of administering the EQAO testing emerged. These benefits have been grouped into three main themes: increased resources and funding, improved classroom instruction, and preparation for high school.

3.5.2.1   Increased Resources and Funding

By far the most frequently cited benefit of using EQAO was the extra resources and funding that administering the test has accrued to the school. Given the widespread under-funding of First Nations elementary institutions, schools such as this one need to battle for funding year after year and be creative in how they seek out resources. Both teachers and administration argued that administering EQAO gives the school administration data that is recognized by provincial and federal authorities that can demonstrate the schools' needs. This data can be used to show that the school requires extra support services and to lobby for additional educational resources. The year over year results also provide a mechanism to demonstrate the improvement that the extra resources are making, which helps in turn to garner further resources and funding. That

is, the school can show funding agencies that they are putting the extra dollars to good use and that future funding will be put to good use as well.

For this school, the ability to clearly demonstrate the needs of their students through EQAO has meant extra educational assistants; additional time with speech pathologists, counselors and other specialized second-level services; more professional development for teachers; a new developmental reading assessment program that includes a book room; and a literacy coach that works with the primary teachers. One teacher noted that they now had a full time educational assistant in math, which was desperately needed, because of the test results. Reflecting the feelings voiced by the administration and many of the teachers, one participant commented:

> *I think the results have been an eye opener, that we can say, ok, see we need a speech pathologist, we need EAs in our classrooms, we need counseling, we need all these other specialized services. So it's been used as a tool to get funds, to get people, to get help for our students. So that's what I think the main positive thing is as a result of doing these tests . . . We can completely show these are our scores, this is what we need. It's all concrete.*

In the context of unstable funding and continually battling for resources, the test results were being used as a means to garner additional funds to meet the school's needs. For many of the teachers, it was this benefit that made participating in the testing most worthwhile. It should be noted, however, that not all teachers felt that the ends justified the means. One teacher in particular expressed reservations, stating:

> *I think in the First Nations school I don't know if there's a better solution or not, but there could be a more personalized solution that would fit better. Maybe testing is the only thing they can do, but it just seems like the only reason to have the test is to compare themselves to the province and say we're doing well and try and get more money so we can keep improving. I don't know if that's a good enough reason for the test.*

3.5.2.2   Improved Classroom Instruction

Another positive aspect of administering EQAO cited by many teachers was that it had improved their classroom instruction techniques and strategies. It was argued that

participating in EQAO and working to prepare students for the test had helped to keep teachers current with the curriculum and with best teaching practices. For example, one teacher noted that the leveling EQAO uses to grade responses had encouraged them to teach students how to build better answers in steps. According to this teacher:

It [EQAO] helped us to understand I think as teachers, how to get the kids to communicate better, but in stages, as opposed to saying 'ok, this is the perfect sentence and this is a perfect paragraph,' and never really showing them how to build up to that.

By teaching students new literacy skills in stages, students could better understand the process of building upon elementary skills to improve their oral and written communication.

Classroom instruction had also been improved through the professional development that has accompanied the implementation of EQAO. Due to EQAO, teachers of grades 3 and 6 had been sent to professional development days with a local provincial school board to learn more about the testing. One teacher in particular noted that this had led them to adjust their teaching style:

I have [had to adjust my style of instruction] but I think for the better. I think a lot of the things I have learned through professional development and speaking with others is really best practice . . . I think the things I do in the classroom aren't necessarily for EQAO, I think it helps the kids overall. It's best teaching practice, but it's come about because of EQAO.

Thus, EQAO had led to additional professional development that had kept grade 3 and grade 6 teachers current on new teaching strategies and promising practices. Whether and how this was filtered to other teachers in the school was unclear, but ideally the promising practices would be shared with and discussed amongst the teachers who did not receive the professional development as well.

In addition to the best practices learned from EQAO-focused professional development, administering EQAO had helped to provide both individual staff and the school as a whole direction and goals to work towards. The test results were used by many teachers to see where students were having difficulties and where instruction

needed to be improved. While few reported that they used EQAO test scores to assess where individual students excelled or needed improvement, teachers were more likely to look at the schools' overall results and use these to focus on areas where students had done poorly.

At the school level, this had been translated into division-wide long-term literacy planning in the primary grades, a key area where EQAO had shown students were struggling. A literacy coach began to work with the teachers to develop a cohesive plan to improve students' literacy. These meetings and the planning had also led to improved consistency among the grades in terms of what was being taught from year to year. Primary teachers reported that they were working towards teaching the same literacy units at the same time, which would ensure that students could build upon what they had learned year after year and would allow teachers to work together and draw on each other as they teach units simultaneously. While this had been a positive development, a number of teachers noted that they would like to see even more done with the test results in terms of school and division-wide strategizing and planning.

3.5.2.3   Preparation for High school

As in many First Nations communities, there was no high school on the reserve where this elementary school was located. Therefore, students would have to attend a nearby provincial high school outside of their community after they graduated. About half of the teachers interviewed raised this issue and felt that administering EQAO helped to better prepare their students for attending high school off reserve. One element of this was a recognition that once students reached high school, they would have to write the EQAO mathematics test in Grade 9 and the literacy test in Grade 10. The Grade 10 literacy test is a graduation requirement. By using the EQAO testing in elementary school, it was thought that the students would be familiar with the testing and would be more likely to have the skills necessary to do well on the secondary school assessments. One teacher explained:

> It [EQAO] has been a positive experience, because we're tired of hearing about how our kids
> are going into the city and failing. That really concerns us, when they hit high school and

they don't have these skills, a lot of them are dropping out. We want to prepare them and have them meet the province, you know, head on, and have the skills that everybody else does to survive in that environment.

Administering EQAO has been one way to equip students with some of the skills that would be necessary for success in the provincial high school system. That is, by using EQAO students at this school become familiar and more comfortable with both the format and content of this type of assessment. A few teachers reported that these feelings had been echoed by parents, who were worried about whether their children would be fully prepared to integrate into the provincial school system. With EQAO, parents could see how their child fared on a test that was taken by all students in Ontario and could see that their child was learning comparable skills to those taught in the provincial school system.

Additionally, it was noted that since implementing EQAO communication and resource sharing between the school and the local provincial school board had increased. The grade 8 teachers at this school began to meet with teachers and administrators from the local high school along with other grade 8 teachers from feeder schools to talk about EQAO math results and discuss areas to focus on and strategies to prepare students for the grade 9 EQAO math assessment.

3.5.3   Challenges for First Nations Schools

Implementing and administering EQAO assessments in this First Nations school was certainly not an easy undertaking. Both teachers and administrators noted that in the beginning, the testing created a lot of problems and negative feelings in the school. This was likely in large part due to the way the testing was implemented, as it was sprung on teachers, students, and parents with little advance warning by a previous administration. Teachers did not have time to understand the process or prepare students and it generated a lot of confusion and anger. While this was a unique situation, the school's experience can illuminate some of the challenges that First Nations schools may face when introducing and using a provincial assessment system.

3.5.3.1   Low Initial Test Scores

When EQAO was first implemented at this school, the test scores were alarmingly low. Not only did this hurt teacher morale, it also caused both parents and the community education council to question the effectiveness of the administration and the school as a whole. While the administration of the day was let go, the current administration had also faced a lot of "heat" over the test scores. According to one interview participant, there were "bitter, bitter battles for the first two years". This can be a very trying situation and could lead to a desire to abandon the testing completely. Participants noted that there needs to be a strong administration in place that can withstand the criticism and questioning and can use the results for planning.

One positive benefit of the low initial scores, however, was that it united parents and the community and promoted action to improve the education students were receiving. For example, after the initial test results came in, the community offered additional funding to put extra supports in place to assess and assist students. Thus, when test scores are initially low it can be quite challenging for the school, but the low scores can also motivate action and change.

Finally, participants noted that test scores have to be put into perspective. There are other types of learning and knowledge that need to factor in to an assessment of a student's performance or the overall quality of a school, especially for First Nations schools where the EQAO tests clearly do not measure all aspects of learning that are important to First Nations communities. As one teacher stated, the testing is not the "be all, end all". Rather, test results need to be understood as one measure among many that can be used to assess student and school performance in the areas that are tested. Reflecting this understanding, teachers often used the term "snap-shot" when discussing EQAO scores, suggesting that test scores are understood to be an indicator of performance on selected measures at one point in time.

3.5.3.2   Publication of Assessment Results

Since 2003, the Fraser Institute[32] has been publishing an annual 'School Report Card' for elementary and secondary schools in Ontario. The report ranks all schools in Ontario based on their EQAO results, including the First Nations schools that administer the testing. While some teachers were not aware of the Fraser Institute's report, for those who were the publication of the school's test results and its inclusion in the rankings was viewed as a challenging aspect of administering EQAO testing. Despite increases in their scores, since implementing the testing the school had consistently been ranked quite low in the Fraser report and these results often got picked up by both national and local media outlets, bringing negative attention to the community. Commenting on this, a participant stated, "When you get your reputation bandied about across the radio waves, why would they want to put themselves in that position? So it does take a brave stand to do it." Another echoed this sentiment, saying:

> *That's been very difficult for the community to hear and see the comparisons. I think this is one of the, the main point or stress areas for a First Nations community with EQAO, is the community doesn't want to be compared to others.*

These comments suggest that the very fact that First Nations schools are included in the report and ranked against other schools can discourage a school from participating in the testing. At this school, the rankings have led both parents and band council to question the quality of the education being provided at the school and some felt that it was also discouraging for both teachers and students to see their school ranked poorly compared to other schools in Ontario.

An understanding of the various factors that can affect standardized test scores is important in these situations. It has been shown that aside from the quality of the school itself, factors such as socioeconomic status and language skills can have a large impact on standardized test scores. In First Nations schools where English is not the first

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[32] The Fraser Institute is a private conservative public policy think tank in Canada.

language of many students and/or where many of the students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, comparisons with other schools can be invalid and unfair. Thus, many teachers felt that the school should primarily be concerned with comparing their own results to results from previous years.

Participants also pointed out a number of problems with the Fraser Institute's rankings themselves. Firstly, First Nations schools did not begin administering the EQAO testing until significantly after it had begun in the rest of Ontario. Test results are bound to be lower as teachers and students become accustomed to the testing and learn from and respond to previous test results. Comparisons with schools that had been administering the test for far longer were seen as unfair and invalid. Secondly, participants noted that the ranking of schools also masked the real improvements that were being made within the school. Finally, many felt that because the school purchases the test, they should have ownership over the results and should be able to control where, when, and to whom the school's test scores are released.

3.5.3.3 Teacher Turnover

High teacher turnover in some First Nations schools could pose a problem for successfully implementing a provincial standardized assessment. As one teacher stated,

> *I would say for a First Nations school that probably one of the most difficult things is continuity, like teacher turnover. Our school hasn't been as bad, our school has been actually really good, but I know of other schools in [Ontario], that there is teacher turnover every year.*

While this was not necessarily an issue at this school, a number of teachers pointed out that when implementing EQAO it is important that teachers have a good understanding of the testing, of the school, of the students, and of how the testing is and is not being used in the school. Another important element was the need to build trust both between teachers and the administration and between parents and teachers. This type of understanding and trust can be difficult to establish and maintain if teachers are continually coming and leaving the school.

A couple of teachers also spoke about turnover in relation to teachers moving from grade to grade. There seemed to be an understanding that a teacher builds up strategies in a particular grade through teaching in that grade, and that these strategies may be lost when the teacher is transferred to another classroom, as expressed in this quote:

> *I get concerned that let's say, you are in grade 6 or you are in grade 3 and you move out, and then another teacher comes in. That teacher has got strategies and I don't know whether the communication is there, I don't know. You have to look at turnover, teachers move from grade to grade.*

As this teacher suggests, valuable knowledge and skills may be lost when teachers move from grade to grade if there is not a sharing of strategies among the teachers.

3.5.4 Teachers' Suggestions

Throughout the course of the interviews, teachers identified a few areas that they felt could be improved within the school in relation to the administration of EQAO. These suggestions were generally related to better informing teachers about EQAO, to how the EQAO results are used by the school, and to improving continuity among classrooms in terms of what is being taught.

While EQAO had been administered in provincial public schools for many years, its use in this school was much more recent. It is not surprising, then, that a few teachers stated that they would like more information on the EQAO test itself. This was especially the case among teachers who did not teach grade 3 or grade 6. Some of these teachers felt that they were given very little information about the testing and were not involved in the testing process. Reflecting this, there seemed to be some confusion among teachers over who receives individual EQAO results, whether teachers have access to them, and how they can be used:

> *Teacher: I don't know enough about the EQAO. I don't what's tested, I don't know what the test looks like.*

> *Interviewer: Do you think it would be useful to see the test scores?*

Teacher: Absolutely. Yeah, I think usually there is just, you know, a file is kept with the resource people and a file with the teachers. I really don't know who gets them, to be honest with you.

As this exchange indicates, some teachers felt that they were 'out-of-the-loop' on EQAO, and it was clear from the interviews that they would prefer to have more knowledge about the testing. These teachers suggested that the whole school should be involved in both working with EQAO results, as well as ensuring that students are prepared for EQAO. In particular, there was interest expressed in having access to workshops, professional development, and informational material on the EQAO testing that could provide more background knowledge about the testing, what it does and does not measure, and how it can be used both by individual teachers and by the school as a whole.

Related to this, an issue raised by a number of teachers was that they would like to see more being done with the test results. The school's current procedure for handling the test results was described by one teacher as such:

Usually what they do is [the test results] come in and there is not a lot really done with them as far as I know. But they'll come in and there is usually a staff meeting and they talk about the results a bit, just in general how we've scored. And after that, one year I received a copy of the results so that I could look, and I have never received anything since then. So it's really just the one meeting and then we don't really use them.

Another teacher remarked, "I felt that we needed a little bit more time to go over the results. It was just too quick." Teachers generally felt that it would be beneficial to spend more time discussing the EQAO results and to have the entire staff involved in building strategies and developing long-term plans. One teacher suggested the following:

The teachers can break off in their divisions, talk about the results, trends and stuff like that, and maybe come out with a working plan kind of thing. Not just in math but in English as well. Say ok, we need to focus in our division on this because of the test results.

While the teacher stated that this type of discussion and planning had started to be carried out to some extent in the last year, they wanted to see more time being devoted to this process and a greater commitment to follow through with the plans. The issue of following through on plans and strategies was also raised by others, as the following exchange indicates:

Teacher: When the results came out it was one specific staff meeting and it was, ok here are the results.

Interviewer: So there was no discussion of strategy?

Teacher: Not that I know, no, not that I remember, not school wide. So those grades might have sat down and talked about certain things. But there was discussion about having the whole school be on the same page with certain language, certain strategies they use in the classrooms, procedures and routines. But I don't see where it went after that.

Interviewer: Right, beyond that meeting.

Teacher: Yeah, beyond that meeting. But I think the interest was there and the wanting and the need was there, like we really need to do this, we really need to do that, but since that meeting at the beginning of the school year till now, it kind of sometimes gets pushed to the wayside.

Another teacher stated:

My biggest problem is after this has been discussed, there has been somewhat of a breakdown in getting the information to early years, primary early years, the 2s, the 1s, the Ks, to get everyone on board. Like we talked a great game getting it ready and everything and then sometimes we may experience a little bit of breakdown in communication as to what I think the grade 2s should be doing, what the grade 1s should be doing, that sort of thing.

These teachers recognized that developing strategies and plans did not necessarily guarantee that these would be implemented in the school. Thus, they emphasized that teachers and administration needed to follow through on plans that were developed, integrating the strategies on a day to day basis in the school.

There was also some concern expressed that there was a lack of consistency in the school in terms of the specifics of what was being taught from classroom to classroom. Teachers felt that there should be greater consistency in what was being taught from year to year, the terminology that was being used, and the topics that were covered.

> *As I said, you have very little transition that as divisions that we know what each division is doing. Do the grade 7/8s know what the grade 2s are doing? Do the grade 3s know what the grade 4s are doing? No. There isn't that continuum here with the teaching of the students.*

Consistency is a concern when using EQAO because the testing is only administered in two grades, yet the knowledge that is expected to be learned is cumulative. Therefore teachers wanted to ensure that they were building children's skills year after year and that there was continuity in terminology being used. For the primary teachers this seemed to be improving, or at least showed promise of improving, through meetings with all primary teachers and a literacy coach to coordinate efforts and develop long-term plans. There was a sense of excitement among primary teachers about these meetings and all viewed the coordination as a positive step.

3.6 Discussion

While many of the teachers interviewed for this study were uneasy about the testing and its appropriateness for a First Nations school, most felt that despite these issues administering the testing had been a positive experience. Through administering EQAO assessments, the school had been able to use the results to lobby for and receive additional funding and resources, to inform classroom, division, and school-wide planning, and to prepare students for their EQAO exams in high school. Using a provincial standardized exam is not the ideal situation, but given that the school did not have the resources or supports necessary to develop and administer a more culturally appropriate test and because the school had been able to use the testing to garner much needed resources, in the current climate it was accruing benefits to the school that would not otherwise have been realized.

Due to the challenges that First Nations schools can face when implementing a provincial assessment system, teachers interviewed felt that having a strong, stable school administration and community leadership were essential to successfully implementing and using standardized testing in a First Nations school. It was also argued that the administration needs to have the support and trust of teachers, parents, the school council, and the entire community. It is up to the administration to ensure that these stakeholders understand why the testing is being implemented, how the scores should be interpreted and how the results can be used. This is especially vital for teachers, as many participants noted that having all teachers onboard, working together and having continuity throughout the grades are important elements of making the testing a positive experience for the school, and was something that this school was continuing to work towards. It is important to note that many of the participants stated that they were initially against the use of the testing in their school, but as they came to better understand the process and saw how it was being used they began to appreciate its role as an educational tool. This is in line with findings from a Manitoba study, which found that teachers with little to no experience with mandated tests were most likely to have a negative view of standardized testing, while those who were more involved tended to be more positive (Skwarchuk, 2004).

While the American experience and the academic literature on standardized testing are overwhelmingly negative, it is important to distinguish between different types and different uses of testing. Many of the criticisms of standardized testing are made in relation to particular kinds of testing and to the stakes that are attached. For example, standardized tests generally fall into one of two categories: norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. Norm-referenced tests give each student a score in comparison to the average for the norm group, ranking students. This form of testing is often at the centre of much of the criticism of standardized testing, as it does not take into account differences among students, turns small variations in test performance into large differences in results or rank, and provides little information about the actual performance of students. Criterion referenced tests give a score in relation to some pre-specified criteria. This is argued to be

more useful as it can assess whether students are meeting desired standards (Popham, 1986).

However, even more important than the distinction between norm- and criterion-referenced tests are the uses that are made of testing data. It is clear that many unintended negative consequences can result when testing is conceived as having high stakes, such as being tied to funding; being used for student streaming, promotion and retention; being used to publicly rank schools; or carrying strong punitive measures for schools and teachers. Advocates of standardized assessment for Indigenous schools recognize the problems with these forms of testing, but they also point to approaches in which teachers, parents and administrators use the test as only one instructional and diagnostic tool among many (Shields, 1999; Bell et al, 2004). Even academics vehemently opposed to the system of high-stakes testing in the United States are not completely against the use of standardized testing in and of itself. For example, in his discussion of 'workable alternatives' to the testing regime ushered in under NCLB, Apple (2006) presents two accountability systems that both use standardized testing, but in a more limited way and accompanied by various other forms of assessment such as student presentations, portfolios, and performance tasks (Apple, 2006).

It is also important to note that the empirical evidence regarding the criticisms of standardized testing, as outlined previously, has been mixed. For example, while Shepard and Dougherty (1991) found that two-thirds of teachers reported giving greater emphasis to basic skill instruction because of standardized testing, they also found that 63% reported that they increased critical thinking activities, and cooperative learning, divergent problem solving, and reading in books about social studies and science was said to have either increased or was not influenced by standardized testing. In terms of pedagogy, while McNeil (2000) argues that standardized testing serves to deskill teachers and homogenize their teaching styles, Archbald and Porter (1994) and Diamond (2007) both found that teachers retained a sense of control over their instructional practice in spite of the implementation of state mandated standards and testing. These divergent

results point to the difficulty of making any sweeping generalizations about standardized testing in light of its variations in both form and use.

Nonetheless, concerns about the neo-liberal tendencies of high stakes standardized testing and the accompanying movements toward marketization need to be taken seriously. Currently in Ontario, First Nations schools can choose whether or not they wish to administer provincial testing and there are no stakes attached for students, teachers or schools. Under these conditions, the school at the center of this study had been able to accrue benefits by using the test while maintaining a cultural focus. As the federal government moves towards encouraging First Nations schools to implement provincial assessment systems, there will be a need to be vigilant about the ways in which the test results are used by federal and provincial bodies and the impacts of the testing on schools. First Nations communities' desire to know how their students are doing also needs to be taken seriously. For far too long First Nations students have been struggling in education systems that have not been meeting their needs. As Matthew has stated, without the data we do not know how our children are faring (Bell et al, 2004). The difficulty will lie in finding ways to provide the data that First Nations desire so work can be done to improve education for First Nations learners while promoting First Nations control of education and the use of First Nations pedagogies.

If standardized testing is going to be understood and used as a valuable instructional tool it is clear that it cannot be thought of as a panacea, nor as the definitive determinant of a student's academic performance, nor as the primary means to enhance quality. Rather, it must be understood as one measure among many that can provide useful information regarding students' skills and progress at the individual, school, and regional levels, while remaining aware of the limitations. Testing always provides only a snapshot of a particular point in time, with numerous factors impacting students' performance on any given day. Cultural and language bias are real concerns given that testing is typically constructed based on White, middle class norms, and First Nations schools--and their communities--must consider whether the skills tested on externally developed assessments are in line with the skills and knowledge they desire for their students, and

that students desire for themselves (Binda and Lall, 2013). More research is needed into cases in which Indigenous communities are using standardized testing in ways that subvert the neo-liberal thrust of testing culture, and developing their own assessment systems. Thankfully, there are examples of communities doing just this. In the United States, the Navajo Nation is developing innovative cultural standards for students despite the schools' adherence to the NCLB mandates (Navajo Nation, 2013), and in Canada the Indigenous Education Coalition is working with researchers at Western University to reconceptualise assessment approaches in culturally appropriate ways (AFN, 2012).

This study presents only one school's experience with standardized testing, as understood by the teachers and school administrator. Examination of other schools' experiences, as well as including the views of students, parents, and education board members is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the impact of externally developed assessment systems on First Nations schools. A multi-year study could illuminate the longer term effects of the use of testing, and examine how experiences and impacts of testing change as external conditions (e.g. political, economic) shift and alter.

Standardized testing in First Nations schools is sure to continue to be a contentious issue. Alongside critiques in the scholarly literature, there is far less said about the real use and need that Indigenous educators and community leaders see for this type of assessment. As First Nations groups have pointed out, test results can provide much needed data about the academic performance of First Nations students that can be used to highlight inequities in the system, bring attention to funding inadequacies, and act as a catalyst for critical dialogue and change. However, it is important to note that many of the benefits of standardized testing are not intrinsic to the testing in and of itself, but to the uses that can be made of assessment results within the current political climate. While there needs to be continued vigilance about the impact of the use of standardized testing on the ability of First Nations peoples to exert control over their educational systems and the ways in which testing is used in First Nations schools, it may be beneficial to think of assessment as a tool of empowerment for First Nations peoples and focus on creating assessments that support this approach.

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Chapter 4

4 Educational Expectations of First Nations Applicants to Postsecondary Education

Increasing postsecondary education (PSE) attainment among First Nations learners has the potential to significantly improve the well-being of First Nations peoples and their communities. Attainment of a PSE credential has been linked to higher income and improved labour market outcomes, as well as enhanced health outcomes and greater social integration (Canadian Council on Learning 2009; Mendelson 2006; Sharpe et al. 2009). As the education of community members increases, communities as a whole experience benefits such as economic development, enhanced innovation, improved social cohesion, reduced reliance on social assistance, and positive inter-generational effects (Wolfe and Haveman 2001; Clatworthy 2009). In addition, PSE has been identified as the 'new buffalo' for Indigenous peoples, crucial to ensuring a prosperous future (Stonechild 2006).

From past reports, we know that many First Nations learners experience barriers and challenges to pursuing higher education, including cultural alienation, lack of role models, distance from home communities, and inadequate financial resources (Holmes 2005; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2000; Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation 2005; ACCC 2010; Malatest, 2004). There is very little known, however, about educational expectations and aspirations. Educational expectations are a fundamental part of the attainment process, and have been shown to be a key predictor of eventual educational attainment (Astin, 1977; Beal and Crockett, 2010; Brookover et al. 1967; Carpenter and Fleishmann 1987; Hossler and Stage 1992; Nurmi, 2004; South, Baumer and Lutz 2003).

A considerable body of literature has examined the various factors that impact the formation of educational expectations. While these studies have shed light on a variety of personal, family, and community characteristics that are correlated with educational expectations, there has not been a focus on the expectations of Indigenous learners. In

addition, previous studies have focused almost exclusively on examining educational aspirations and expectations of youth. First Nations learners often experience non-traditional pathways, and enter or continue PSE later in life (Hango, 2011). It has been argued that a linear trajectory is no longer the norm for most youth, as changing social and economic conditions have challenged the straight school to work model and led to the creation of new educational patterns and pathways (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000). First Nations understandings of education as a lifelong pursuit call attention to the need to recognize that learning occurs at all ages, and that educational plans are not static; they shift and change over time. This study expands on the literature by moving the focus away from models that examine expectations only for youth, to examining the expectations of learners as they consider embarking on PSE regardless of their current age.

Utilizing data from a large-scale Canadian survey, this article examines the educational plans of First Nations learners who are applying to PSE. Two key research questions guide this study:

1. To what extent do personal, family, community, and academic factors impact the educational expectations of First Nations learners?

2. How well do prominent theoretical approaches to educational expectations explain the educational expectations of First Nations learners?

4.1 Literature Review

4.1.1 Distinguishing Expectations and Aspirations

As a number of researchers have argued, it is important to distinguish between educational expectations and aspirations (Carter, 2002; Hanson, 1994; Morgan, 1998, Trusty, 2000). Aspirations are conceptualized as desired outcomes that individuals hope to achieve absent of constraints (Hauser and Anderson, 1991) while expectations are understood to reflect more realistic plans (Mickelson, 1990). While these terms are often used interchangeably, researchers have found a clear gap between aspirations and

expectations when conceptualized in this way. That is, what learners may desire to achieve often differs from what they reasonably believe they will be able to achieve. Further, this gap has been documented to grow larger as individuals age and become more attuned to institutional and environmental constraints (Hanson, 1994). While educational expectations are the focus of this study, the literature on both expectations and aspirations is reviewed as similar theoretical and methodological approaches are used.

4.1.2   Theoretical Approaches

Educational aspirations and expectations have been of longstanding interest to sociologists and social psychologists, and have been shown to be key predictors of eventual educational attainment (Astin, 1977; Beal and Crockett, 2010; Brookover et al., 1967; Carpenter and Fleishmann, 1987; Hossler and Stage, 1992; Nurmi, 2004; South, Baumer and Lutz, 2003). The Wisconsin model of status attainment has been the dominant theoretical approach used in researching aspirations and expectations (Kao and Tienda, 1998: Sewell, Haller, and Portes, 1969; Bozick et al, 2010; Morgan, 1996). This model posits that youth acquire a sense of their future educational horizons through socialization processes that are shaped by socioeconomic status (Woelfel and Haller, 1971; Sewell et al, 1970; Haller and Portes, 1973). Thus, status related differences in youths' home, school, and peer environments impact educational aspirations, which then direct youth towards certain educational pathways. Attainment is ultimately impacted through the influence of aspirations on incremental educational choices, activities, and behaviours (Nurmi, 2004). This process serves to perpetuate a family's socioeconomic status across generations, as youth from high socioeconomic backgrounds tend to experience support and encouragement that fosters aspirations for higher levels of education, while disadvantaged youth tend to experience home and school environments that direct youth to lower aspirations.

Status attainment theories have primarily focused on how relationships with family, teachers, and friends, as well as self-reflexive understandings of personal school performance shape the expectations of youth and propel them towards differentiated

educational pathways. While this model has dominated the literature on educational aspirations and expectations since the 1970s, it has also been heavily criticized. One prominent critique is that the Wisconsin model explains little of the variance in the expectations of females and ethnic minorities. The Wisconsin model was developed and tested in the 1970s using White males and assumed that the social environments of youth from similar socioeconomic strata were relatively homogenous. In attempts to extend the model to women and to more diverse ethnic populations, it has generally been found to be much less applicable (Berman and Haug, 1975; Campbell, 1983; Kao and Tienda, 1998; Beutel and Anderson, 2007).

The causal order of the attainment process in the Wisconsin model has also been questioned. The Wisconsin model theorizes that socioeconomic status and mental ability influence academic performance and social interactions with significant others. These interactions and students' perception of their own academic ability then impact their level of aspiration, and it is the resulting aspirations that ultimately influence educational attainment (Sewell, Haller, and Portes, 1969; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970). Aspirations are seen as the intervening behavioural mechanism leading to attainment, and they are assumed to be indicative of a static mental state interpreted as latent achievement motivation (Haller, 1982). While the theory is plausible, there is little empirical support for the causal order of the process (Morgan, 2005). Further, the model assumes that individuals operate within a relatively free society, influenced only by their socialization and ability (Carter, 2002; Kerckhoff, 1976). Noting these shortcomings, two alternative models of expectations were developed: social allocation and rational choice.

The social allocation approach to status attainment theorizes that individuals' expectations are constrained by social structure (Kerckhoff, 1976, Kerckhoff, 1984). Allocation processes involved in educational systems are said to "identify, select, process, classify, and assign individuals according to externally imposed criteria" (Kerckhoff, 1976:369). Due to the way in which perceptions of the opportunity structure influence educational plans, expectations are said to be a better measure of knowledge of the real world than of motivation to succeed (Kerckhoff, 1976). Thus, in social allocation

theory it is assumed that low educational expectations are the result of life circumstances. This approach has been criticized for being overly deterministic and ignoring individual agency (Carter, 2002).

In contrast, rational choice theory holds that educational plans are shaped by perceptions of the costs and benefits of educational attainment and alternative choices (Alexander and Cook, 1979; Boudon, 1974; Morgan, 1998). The assumption is that individuals form their expectations on the basis of their own cognitive evaluations of exogenous variables such as labour market incentives and the availability of resources to pursue higher education (Morgan, 1998). While rational choice theories have received some support (Goldthorpe, 1996; Lloyd et al, 2008), the assertion that rational evaluative processes are the primary driver of educational expectations has been challenged by research showing that for many youth, expectations stabilize as early as grade 4– an age at which it is unlikely that many youth are thinking self-reflexively about the opportunity structure and its impact on their future schooling (Bozick et al, 2010; Andrew and Hauser, 2012). Thus, while social allocation theory assigns individuals too little agency, rational choice theory tends to give too much credence to the impact of cognitive evaluations on expectations.

A final theoretical approach to the study of educational expectations that is gaining greater prominence is cultural reproduction theory (Andres et al, 2007; Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Carter, 2002; Hanson, 1994; Hatcher, 1998; Vaisey, 2010). Based on Bourdieu's work, cultural reproduction theory argues that aspirations and expectations are influenced by cultural capital – a set of non-financial assets such as attitudes, knowledge, and style of speech that are transmitted from families to their children (Bourdieu, 1986). Due to the transmission of cultural capital, individuals from middle- and upper-class families possess the dispositions and habits that enable them to feel comfortable and succeed in the school organizational culture, which is itself based on the norms of the dominant social class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). While rational choice theory assumes that individuals make decisions within an educational system that is itself neutral, cultural reproduction theory emphasizes relational class power and sees educational institutions as a tool of the dominant social class for cultural reproduction. To

ensure that the system appears fair and valid, individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds often experience a 'cooling out' process in which their experiences and interactions within educational settings point away from PSE attendance. This makes it seem as though lower levels of attainment are a matter of choice or due to lesser academic ability, legitimizing the continuity of the stratification system (Bozick et al, 2010; Goldthorpe, 1996).

Cultural reproduction theory has been useful in pointing to the 'hidden curriculum' of schools, and understanding the ways in which structural factors operate to limit the educational horizons of youth. However, this emphasis on structural factors can lead to a fatalist approach, and is unable to account for recent trends within education in which PSE attendance is becoming much more widespread among all social classes. In Canada, the proportion of the population aged 15 and over attaining a PSE certificate, diploma or degree increased 20 percentage points from 1990 to 2011 (HRSDC, 2012). Given that over half of Canadians now have a PSE credential, it is clear that those outside the upper echelons of society are not excluded from the educational system to the extent that cultural reproduction theory would suggest. Thus, while Bourdieu often argued for the role of agency and improvisation, cultural reproduction theory is criticized for being overly deterministic and ignoring the role of resistance (Brown, 1987; Jenkins, 1982; Morrow and Torres, 1995). Further, in focusing on class differences, the intersections between ethnic, gender, and class based systems of stratification are not thoroughly examined.

Fortunately, a number of research studies have examined the salience of ethnicity for educational expectations. Much of this literature has focused on African American youth, finding that when background factors such as socioeconomic status are controlled, African American youth have significantly higher educational expectations than those of White youth (Crowley and Shapiro, 1982; Astin, 1990; Hanson, 1994; Morgan, 1996). This has been labelled the "attitude-achievement paradox", in that despite African American youths' positive regard for education, they experience lower levels of educational attainment (Mickelson, 1990). A second consistent finding in the literature is

that the significance and strength of various determinants of educational expectations vary across ethnic groups (Bohon et al, 2006; Carter, 1999; Goyette and Zie 1999; Farrell et al., 1994; Hanson, 1994; Museus et al., 2010). For example, Bohon et al (2006) found that higher levels of parental educational attainment were not associated with higher expectations to attend college for all ethnicities; Museus et al (2010) found that peer attitudes had a large positive effect on the expectations of Asian youth but were negligible for Black, Latina/o, Native American, and White youth; and Goyette and Zie (1999) report that academic ability explains some of the high expectations of Chinese and Southeast Asians, but none for Filipinos or Japanese. Thus, it is likely that the processes through which individuals formulate their expectations differ by ethnic group. This raises questions about the extent to which prominent theories of expectations, such as status attainment and cultural reproduction, can be applied across all groups.

4.1.3   First Nations Learners' Educational Expectations

Indigenous peoples have been largely absent from the literature on educational expectations. In one of the few studies to include Indigenous youth, Museus et al (2010) found that Native Americans[33] had the lowest educational expectations of the ethnic groups studied. Grades, social involvement, peer attitudes, and parental involvement were found to be positively related to the expectations of these youth.

While there are few studies involving Indigenous peoples in the educational expectations literature, some descriptive information about the educational plans of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners is available, primarily from studies of career perceptions and pathways. Examining the occupational aspirations of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth in grades 6 to 12, Consulbec (2002) found that these youth had high educational expectations. Eighty-three percent (83%) expected to attain some type of postsecondary schooling, and almost half expected to complete a graduate degree.

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[33] Native American is a term used to refer to Indigenous peoples in the United States of America.

In a similar study, 88% of First Nations and Inuit youth surveyed expected that they would attend PSE, with half of these stating that they planned to attend university (EKOS Research Associates, 2006). However, consistent with findings from studies of visible minority and low-income youth (Bohon et al, 2006; Trusty, 2000), educational expectations tended to decrease with age. In particular, younger respondents were more likely to intend to pursue university, while respondents age 17-19 were more likely to plan to attend college. To my knowledge, however, no studies to date have examined the determinants of educational expectations of First Nations learners in Canada. This study will examine the extent to which educational expectations among First Nations PSE applicants are influenced by individual, family, and community variables, acknowledging that these factors are themselves shaped by the wider socio-historical-cultural context experienced by First Nations learners.

While the focus of this study is First Nations learners' educational expectations, a non-Aboriginal comparator group is used to provide some indication of how the findings are similar to, or different from, findings for other learners. The non-Aboriginal comparison group used here is itself made up of a large number of different ethnic groups that could each be considered separately. The decision was made to maintain one comparison group rather than report on each ethnic group separately in order to maintain the focus on First Nations learners.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Data

The data being used for these analyses are from the University and College Applicant Study (UCAS), an annual survey of applicants to Canadian colleges and universities that is conducted by Academica Group, a research firm located in London, Ontario. The survey is conducted online in the spring of each year. Data from the 2010 and 2011 surveys are used here. The 2010 and 2011 UCAS surveys were sent to a random sample of applicants to Ontario colleges, as well as all applicants to 35 postsecondary institutions

in Canada that participated in the 2010 and/or 2011 UCAS. The overall sample, therefore, is a non-representative sample of applicants to postsecondary institutions in Canada.

For this analysis, the sample was limited to Canadian applicants who had no former college or university experience. Within this sample, 1042 respondents identified as Aboriginal. Given that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are very diverse groups and that First Nations education is the focus of this dissertation, only those who stated that they were First Nations were selected for analysis (n=611). For comparative purposes, respondents who did not identify as Aboriginal were retained as a comparison group (n=56,468).

Of the 57,079 cases remaining in the dataset, 30,916 had complete data (54.2%) while 26,163 were missing data on at least one variable (45.8%) (Table 11). Further analysis showed that having missing data was associated with educational expectations [$F(1, 57077)=235.09$, $p=.00$], high school grade average [$F(1,56056)=253.45$, $p=.00$), social support [$F(1,53457)=23.64$, $p=.00$], age [$\chi2 (2)=8.26$, $p=.02$], household income [$\chi2 (2)=330.82$, $p=.00$], gender [$\chi2 (1)=98.62$, $p=.00$], dependent children [$\chi2 (1)=6.40$, $p=.01$], community size [$\chi2 (2)=35.80$, $p=.00$], country of birth [$\chi2 (1)=25.67$, $p=.00$], and region of residence [$\chi2 (4)=62.49$, $p=.00$].

Those with missing data were more likely to have lower educational expectations, lower high school grade averages, lower levels of social support, and lower household income. They were also less likely to be born in Canada or have children, and more likely to be female, under age 19, be from a community with more than 50,000 people, and to be from the Prairies or Western Canada.

Table 11 Missing Data

n=57079	Valid		Missing	
	n	%	n	%
Age	56979	99.8%	100	0.2%
Born in Canada	56263	98.6%	816	1.4%
Community Size	52985	92.8%	4094	7.2%
Dependent children	51343	90.0%	5736	10.0%
Disability	51230	89.8%	5849	10.2%
Parents' education	55026	96.4%	2053	3.6%
Gender	56972	99.8%	107	0.2%
High school grade average (final year)	56058	98.2%	1021	1.8%
Household Income	34488	60.4%	22591	39.6%
Marital Status	50673	88.9%	6406	11.2%
Region of Residence	55539	97.3%	1540	2.7%
Sources of Social Support	53459	93.7%	3620	6.3%

To enable analysis of all cases in the dataset, multiple imputation was used. Multiple imputation relies on observed values that are related to the missing values to predict imputed values for the missing data. This is generally considered the method of choice for handling missing data, and improves the quality of estimation over using only complete data (King et al, 2001; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). SPSS 20 multiple imputation procedures were used to create and analyze five imputed data sets.

Given the large disparity in the sample size for First Nations respondents and the comparison group (611 vs. 56,468), the comparison group was rebased using weighting procedures. This involved applying a weight of .01082028759651 to non-Aboriginal respondents for a weighted sample size of 611, allowing all of the original data to be used in the analysis. The weighting does not impact proportions or regression estimates, and ensures that the significance tests are comparable between the First Nations and non-Aboriginal samples.[34]

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[34] There are a number of ways of dealing with large sample sizes. While not shown here, a sensitivity analysis was performed to examine the effects of a simple reduced n size method on the statistical significance of predictors. Given the large sample size of the non Aboriginal population, a random sample (1/100) was generated and the weighted sample and the subsample were compared with strict attention paid to statistical significance in conjunction with practical significance of the variables. No key differences were observed. Given that both methods produced similar results, the reduced n size weighting

4.2.2   Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is a measure of educational expectations obtained from the question, "What is the ultimate academic credential you plan to attain?" Respondents were provided with twelve response options, ranging from college certificate (1 year program) to doctorate. Following Looker and Thiessen (2004), responses were recoded into the approximate number of years of postsecondary schooling that correspond to each response option to create a continuous variable. This results in numbers that are more easily understood, and enables the use of multivariate linear regression analysis techniques. The resulting variable ranges from 1 to 9 years of postsecondary schooling. In the descriptive analysis, educational expectations are also shown as a categorical variable with three categories: college certificate or diploma; undergraduate degree; advanced degree.

4.2.3   Independent Variables

A comprehensive set of independent variables was chosen based on prior literature. The variables are grouped into three different categories: personal background factors (age, gender, marital status, dependent children, disability, immigrant status); academic performance (high school GPA); and family and community resources/characteristics (household income, parents' education, community size, and social support).

4.2.3.1   Personal Background Factors

Age was coded into three categories: 19 or younger, 20-24, and 25 or over. Gender is coded as male or female. Marital status was coded as single (never married) or ever married, which includes those who were married, common-law, divorced, widowed, or separated. The variable "dependent children" is coded as yes or no. The disability

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method was selected as it increases the comparability of the two sets of analyses while also retaining all of the original data.

variable is coded yes if the respondent indicated having a physical, mental health, or learning disability, and no if no disability was reported.

For the non-Aboriginal sample there is also measure of immigrant status, coded as immigrant or Canadian-born.

4.2.3.2   Academic Performance

Respondents were asked to report their high school grade average by selecting one of nine response options ranging from a low of "below 60%" and increasing by 5% intervals to a high of "95%-100%". This was treated as a scale variable.

4.2.3.3   Family and Community Resources/Characteristics

Four measures of family and community resources/background were available in the UCAS: household income, parents' education, community size, and social support. Household income is measured by a categorical variable: less than $60,000, $60,000 to $120,000, and $120,000 or more. Parents' education is a dichotomous variable indicating whether either of a respondent's parents had completed any postsecondary studies. If at least one parent or guardian had completed PSE, parents' education was coded as "completed postsecondary studies". Community size was coded into three categories based on population size, less than 50,000; 50,001-500,000; and 500,000 or more.

Region of residence was also provided in the UCAS, but is largely a reflection of the institutions that participated in the UCAS within each region. For example, in some regions primarily colleges participated while in other regions it was primarily universities. Therefore, region is used in the descriptive overview of the sample only, and is not included in the bivariate or multivariate analysis. Region of residence was constructed from respondent provided postal code and is a five category variable consisting of Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, and Western Canada.

Social support is generally understood to refer to the supportive resources provided through our social ties or networks (House, 1981), and can include emotional support, positive interaction, and informational support. In relation to educational decisions, major

sources of support are generally family, friends, and school personnel such as teachers and guidance counsellors (Wall, Covell, and MacIntyre, 1999). The measure of social support used here is derived from responses to a survey question asking respondents which of a series of seven sources they used for information about their PSE options. The response options provided were parents or family members, friends, high school guidance counsellor, high school teacher, high school coach, a professor, and current students or graduates. A count of the number of sources each respondent indicated they had utilized was used to create a scale variable ranging from 0 to 7 sources of support.

4.2.4   Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and ANOVA were used to assess the bivariate relationships between educational expectations and the independent variables for both First Nations and non-Aboriginal respondents.

For multivariate analysis, multiple linear regression was performed using SPSS 20 with educational expectations as the dependent variable. Predictor variables were entered in blocks to assess the impact of each set of predictors on educational expectations. The first block of variables entered were personal background factors (age and gender), followed by family and community resources/characteristics (household income, parents' education, community size, and social support), and then academic performance (high school GPA). While marital status and dependent children are included in the descriptive and bivariate analysis, they are not included in the regression as both variables are highly correlated with age. Disability is also excluded from the regression models as the distribution of this variable was highly skewed, with a very small number of respondents reporting a disability. The same model is run for the non-Aboriginal respondents as a means of comparison[35]. By using the same sample, procedure, and statistical methods, differences found between the regression analyses can more reliably be attributed to

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[35] The determinants of educational expectations have been shown to vary by ethnicity (Bohon et al, 2006; Carter, 1999; Goyette and Zie 1999; Farrell et al., 1994; Hanson, 1994; Museus et al., 2010). Thus, conducting separate regression analyses allows an examination of differences in the model fit between First Nations and non-First Nations respondents.

differences in the processes that determine expectations for First Nations and non-Aboriginal applicants (Morgan, 1996; Looker and Thiessen, 2004).

Following Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) the assumptions of multivariate analysis were assessed including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, absence of outliers, and absence of multicollinearity. Analysis of graphical plots showed no significant deviation from linearity or normality. There was no evidence of multicollinearity among the independent variables in the Collinearity Diagnostics, and none of the tolerance values approached zero. Finally, the data was examined for multivariate outliers. Following Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), $p=.001$ was the statistical criterion used for identifying multivariate outliers. Using this p-value, a case is considered a multivariate outlier if the standardized residual is in excess of +/-3.3. As a further check for outliers, Mahalanobis distance, Cook's distance, and leverage statistics were also examined. No cases were found to exceed the critical value on Mahalanobis distance at $p=.001$ for the First Nations sample and one case for the non-Aboriginal sample. However, the Cook's distance and leverage statistic suggested that it did not exert a strong influence on the analysis. Influence and leverage statistics (Cook's distance and leverage statistics) were also examined for both sets of data and no additional outliers were found. However, examination of the residuals plot suggested a problem with heteroscedasticity. Heteroscedasticity does not bias the regression estimates, but does bias the standard errors and thus the significance tests. Various transformations of the dependent and independent variables were run but they did not improve the residuals plot. The model was also run using Huber-White estimators which correct for the heteroscedasticity. No substantive differences were found, so it can be concluded that the heteroscedasticity is minimal and is not impacting the importance of the independent variables in the model. Thus, the ordinary least squares linear regression model is used because it is more straightforward to understand and interpret.

4.3   Results

This section presents the results of the analysis, moving from the descriptive statistics, to bivariate analysis, and finally the multivariate results.

4.3.1   Descriptives

Descriptive statistics are presented here to provide an overview of the First Nations and non-Aboriginal samples (Table 12). The majority of First Nations respondents were female (69.8%) and under age 20 (73.6%). Roughly one-tenth of respondents reported having dependent children (12.7%) and a similar proportion reported being ever married (12.8%). About 9.7% of First Nations respondents reported having a disability.

Almost half of First Nations respondents had a household income less than $60,000 (49.5%), while over one-third had a household income between $60,001-$120,000 and the remaining 12.2% reported a household income of $120,000 or higher.

With regard to region of residence, 67.1% of First Nations respondents were from Ontario, 20.4% from the Prairies, 5.4% from Western Canada, 4.6% from Atlantic Canada, and 2.6% from Quebec. This reflects the regional distribution of the institutions that participated in the UCAS, though First Nations respondents were slightly less concentrated in Ontario (67.1%) than other respondents (77.1%). Most First Nations respondents were from communities of less than 50,000 people (59.6%) and only 10.3% were from a large city (population of 500,000 or more).

Table 12 Descriptive Results

		First Nations (n=611)	Non-Aboriginal (unweighted n=56468)
Gender	Female	69.8%	61.5%
	Male	30.2%	38.5%
Age	19 or younger	73.6%	90.1%
	20-24	17.6%	7.1%
	25 or older	8.7%	2.8%
Marital Status	Single, never married	87.2%	94.4%
	Ever married	12.8%	5.6%
Dependent children	Yes	12.7%	2.1%
	No	87.3%	97.9%
Disability	Yes	9.7%	5.3%
	No	90.3%	94.7%
Immigrant Status	Immigrant	-	23.5%
	Canadian-born	100.0%	76.5%
Community Size	Less than 50,000	59.6%	33.6%
	50,001 - 500,0000	30.1%	45.1%
	500,000+	10.3%	21.3%
Parents' Education	High school or less	24.5%	16.2%
	PSE	75.5%	83.8%
Household Income	$60,000 or less	49.1%	35.8%
	$60,001-$120,000	38.7%	45.4%
	$120,000 or over	12.2%	18.7%
Region of residence	Atlantic Canada	4.6%	2.5%
	Québec	2.6%	0.6%
	Ontario	67.1%	77.1%
	The Prairies	20.4%	16.6%
	Western Canada	5.4%	3.1%
Sources of Social Support	*Mean*	3.24	3.68
High School GPA	*Mean*	79.2	82.4
Educational Expectations	College certificate or diploma	32.1%	15.7%
	Undergraduate degree	24.1%	27.0%
	Advanced degree	43.9%	57.3%
	Mean (years)	4.59	5.34

The mean high school grade average among First Nations respondents was 79.2%.
Respondents were also asked about their parents' highest level of education. About three
quarters stated that their parents had completed some level of PSE (75.5%). On average,
First Nations respondents reported having 3.24 sources of support in their PSE decision
making with the possible range being 0 to 7. The most commonly used sources of support
were current students (63.5%) and friends (60.6%).

On the dependent variable, educational expectations, a little less than half of First Nations
respondents planned to attain an advanced degree such as a graduate or professional

degree (43.9%), 24.1% planned to attain a university undergraduate degree, and 32.1% a college diploma. The mean years of postsecondary schooling expected was 4.59 years.

Compared to respondents who did not identify as being First Nations, First Nations respondents were more likely to be female, ever married, and to have children. Consistent with research showing that the First Nations postsecondary student population is generally older (ACCC and HRSDC, 2008; Mendelson, 2006; Holmes, 2005), less than one-fifth of First Nations applicants were age 20-24 (17.6%) and almost one-tenth were 25 years of age or older (8.7%) compared to 7.1% and 2.8% of non-Aboriginal applicants, respectively. First Nations applicants were also more likely to have a disability and to be from a community of less than 50,000. Finally, the parents of First Nations applicants had lower levels of education, and First Nations applicants reported fewer sources of social support, lower high school GPA's, and lower household incomes.

Comparing the educational plans of First Nations applicants to other applicants, First Nations applicants planned to complete slightly fewer years of PSE than other applicants. The mean years of schooling expected among First Nations respondents was 4.59 years, compared to 5.34 years for other applicants. Examining the educational plans of applicants by the type of schooling expected, a greater proportion of First Nations respondents expected to attain a college diploma as their highest level of education compared to other applicants (32.1% vs. 15.7%) and fewer expected to attain an advanced degree (43.9% vs. 57.3%).

4.3.2   Profile of Educational Expectations

Table 13 and Table 14 present the bivariate analysis of educational expectations by each of the independent variables for First Nations respondents, and Table 15 and Table 16 present the results for non-Aboriginal respondents. While gender differences in expectations were not significant, for both First Nations and non-Aboriginal respondents expectations decreased with age. Similarly, respondents who were ever married or had dependent children had lower educational expectations. These differences were more pronounced among non-Aboriginal respondents than First Nations respondents.

Educational expectations were lower for respondents with a disability, and this difference was more pronounced among First Nations respondents. Among non-Aboriginal respondents, immigrants had significantly higher educational expectations than those who were born in Canada.

Of the family and community resources/characteristics variables, parents' educational attainment was statistically significant for both First Nations and non-Aboriginal respondents, while community size was significant for non-Aboriginal respondents only and household income was only significant for First Nations respondents. Respondents whose parents had completed PSE had higher expectations than those whose parents had not completed PSE. For non-Aboriginal respondents, those from large urban settings had the highest educational expectations, followed by respondents from cities with 50,000-500,000 people. Respondents from relatively small communities (less than 50,000 people) had the lowest educational expectations. Finally, among First Nations respondents, those with family incomes over $120,000 had significantly higher expectations than those with lower incomes. Social support and educational expectations were positively correlated for both First Nations (Pearson's r=0.122) and non-Aboriginal (Pearson's r=0.131) respondents, meaning that higher levels of social support were associated with higher educational expectations.

The lone academic performance variable, high school grade average, was also significantly positively associated with educational expectations. As grade average increased, educational expectations increased. The correlation was slightly higher for non-Aboriginal (Pearson's r=0.362) than First Nations respondents (Pearson's r=0.305).

Table 13 Bivariate Relationships (Categorical Variables), First Nations

		First Nations (n=611)			
		n	Mean	SE	p
Gender	Female	426	4.63	.11	.478
	Male	185	4.50	.17	
Age	Under 20	450	4.84	.10	.000
	20-24	108	4.01	.21	
	25+	53	3.70	.30	
Marital Status	Single, never married	533	4.68	.10	.008
	Ever married	78	3.96	.23	
Dependent children	Yes	77	3.93	..26	.005
	No	534	4.69	.10	
Disability	Yes	59	3.86	.29	.012
	No	552	4.67	.09	
Immigrant Status	Immigrant	-	-	-	-
	Canadian-born	-	-	-	
Community Size	Less than 50,000	364	4.55	.12	.178
	50,001 - 500,0000	184	4.50	.15	
	500,000+	63	5.07	.28	
Parents' Education	High school or less	150	4.06	.17	.019
	PSE	461	4.77	.10	
Household Income	$60,0000 or less	300	4.30	.14	.000
	$60,001-$120,000	236	4.73	.16	
	$120,001 or more	75	5.35	.25	

Table 14 Bivariate Relationships (Continuous Variables), First Nations

	First Nations (n=611)	
	r	p
Sources of Social Support	.122	.002
High School GPA	.305	.000

Table 15 Bivariate Relationships (Categorical Variables), Non-Aboriginal

		Non-Aboriginal (unweighted n=56468)			
		n	Mean	SE	p
Gender	Female	376	5.31	.11	.641
	Male	235	5.39	.14	
Age	Under 20	551	5.50	.09	.000
	20-24	43	4.10	.32	
	25+	17	3.25	.48	
Marital Status	Single, never married	577	5.39	.09	.012
	Ever married	34	4.53	.38	
Dependent children	Yes	13	3.46	.08	.001
	No	598	5.40	.59	
Disability	Yes	33	4.63	.39	.046
	No	578	5.38	.09	
Immigrant Status	Immigrant	143	5.96	.18	.000
	Canadian-born	468	5.15	.10	
Community Size	Less than 50,000	205	4.92	.15	.000
	50,001 - 500,0000	276	5.43	.12	
	500,000+	130	5.82	.17	
Parents' Education	High school or less	99	4.65	.22	.000
	PSE	512	5.47	.09	
Household Income	$60,0000 or less	219	5.15	.15	.089
	$60,001-$120,000	277	5.35	.12	
	$120,001 or more	115	5.68	.18	

Table 16 Bivariate Relationships (Continuous Variables), Non-Aboriginal

	Non-Aboriginal (unweighted n=56468)	
	r	p
Sources of Social Support	.131	.001
High School GPA	.362	.000

4.3.3   Multivariate Results

Table 17 presents the results of the regression analysis for First Nations respondents. The first model assessed the impact of personal background variables on educational expectations. As expected, age was negatively associated with educational expectations. That is, older applicants expected to complete fewer years of PSE than younger applicants. Contrary to previous research, however, gender was not found to be a determinant of educational expectations. While measures of model fit showed that Model 1 significantly improved prediction over the intercept-only model ($F[3,607]=7.482$, p= .000), the R^2 was only 0.031. This means that the model explained only 3.1% of the variance in educational expectations.

Next, family and community variables were added. Taken together, these variables were significant in the regression model ($F[6,601]=3.688$, p= .002), and explained an additional 2.5% of the variance in educational expectations. Both parental education and social support had a small positive effect on educational expectations. Applicants who had at least one parent who completed PSE had higher educational expectations than those who did not, and as the level of social support increased, so too did expectations.

Community size and income were significant, but only when comparing the smallest and largest category in each variable. Respondents from the largest communities (population of 500,000 or more) expected to attain higher levels of PSE than those from the smallest communities (population under 50,000). Similarly, those from families in the highest income bracket (over $120,000) had higher educational expectations than those from families in the lowest income bracket (less than $60,000).

Age differences in educational expectations remained significant after controlling for family and community variables, though the impact of age decreased. This suggests that part of the impact of age on educational expectations observed in Model 1 is mediated by differences in family and community characteristics.

In Model 3, the lone academic factor, high school GPA, was introduced. This addition was also significant ($F[1,600]=51.459$, p=.000), and resulted in a large increase in the

proportion of variance explained, bringing the total to 12.9%. Not surprisingly, high school GPA was found to be the strongest determinant of educational expectations in the model. Respondents with higher GPAs expected to attain higher levels of PSE. Even after controlling for GPA, however, the effects of parental education and social support on educational expectations remained. The impact of income and community size on educational expectations became non-significant with the addition of GPA, and the effects of age were reduced. After controlling for GPA, the educational expectations of those age 20-24 was not significantly different than those under age 20. The difference between respondents age 25+ and those under age 20 remained, though it was reduced.

Table 18 presents the results for non-Aboriginal applicants. In the first model we see that much like First Nations applicants, there were no discernible differences between the educational expectations of males and females, and that older applicants had lower expectations. However, the impact of age was much greater for non-Aboriginal applicants, indicated by the larger regression coefficients for both age categories and the greater proportion of variance explained in Model 1.

Among the family and community variables added in Model 2, all but income were found to be significant determinants of non-Aboriginal applicants' educational expectations. Interestingly, the largest determinant was community size, which was found to have little impact on the educational expectations of First Nations applicants. Further, for non-Aboriginal applicants, age continued to have a strong negative impact on educational expectations after controlling for family and community factors.

Table 17 Regression Estimates of Expected Years of Education, First Nations

	Adj. r^2	r^2 change, F change, df1, df2, p F change	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
			B	s.e.	t	p	B	s.e.	t	p	B	s.e.	t	p
(Constant)			4.747	.170	27.881	.000	4.164	.289	14.404	.000	2.167	.402	5.396	.000
Block 1: Personal	.031	.036, 7.482, 3, 607, .000												
Age														
Under 20 (Ref.)														
20-24			-.811	.234	-3.465	.001	-.540	.248	-2.179	.029	-.279	.243	-1.149	.251
25 +			-1.139	.316	-3.609	.000	-.804	.332	-2.423	.015	-.662	.324	-2.045	.041
Gender														
Male (Ref.)														
Female			.126	.193	.654	.513	.236	.194	1.212	.226	.127	.188	.678	.498
Block 2: Family/Community	.056	.034, 3.688, 6, 601, .002												
Parents' Education														
PSE (Ref.)														
High school or less							-.433	.211	-2.054	.040	-.493	.203	-2.426	.015
Social support							.092	.045	2.030	.042	.087	.044	2.004	.045
Community size														
0 to 50,000 population (Ref.)														
50,001 to 500,000							.000	.197	-.002	.998	.056	.190	.294	.769
500,000+							.610	.301	2.029	.042	.535	.289	1.851	.064
Income														
$0 to $60,000 (Ref.)														
$60,001 to $120,000							.228	.235	.969	.338	.131	.237	.550	.587
$120,001 +							.706	.323	2.187	.031	.587	.314	1.870	.065
Block 3: Academic	.129	.073, 51.459, 1, 600, 0.000												
High school GPA											.383	.054	7.041	.000

In the final model, as with First Nations applicants, high school GPA was the strongest predictor of educational expectations, and the addition of this variable doubled the explanatory power of the model, bringing the total variance explained to 20.5%. Unlike in the model for First Nations applicants, however, age and community size continued to be significant determinants of expectations after controlling for GPA, while parents' educational attainment became non-significant. Thus, for non-Aboriginal applicants being a first-generation student was not associated with lower educational expectations once academic performance was held constant. This highlights the connection between parental educational attainment and academic performance, suggesting that academic performance mediates the relationship between expectations and parental education.

It should be noted that in the first two models, the intercept for non-Aboriginal respondents was higher than the intercept for First Nations applicants. Thus, controlling for age and gender, non-Aboriginal applicants were predicted to expect to attain almost one year more of PSE than First Nations applicants (5.6 years and 4.7 years, respectively), with the differences shrinking to just over a half of a year once family and community variables were held constant (4.8 years and 4.2 years, respectively). After the inclusion of academic performance in the final model, however, there remains very little difference between the expectations of First Nations and non-Aboriginal applicants (2.2 years and 2.1 years, respectively).

Table 18 Regression Estimates of Expected Years of Education, Non-Aboriginal

	Adj. r²	r² change, F change, df1, df2, p F change	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
			B	s.e.	t	p	B	s.e.	t	p	B	s.e.	t	p
(Constant)			5.557	.134	41.584	.000	4.792	.269	17.833	.000	2.111	.395	5.349	.000
Block 1: Personal	.064	.069, 14.893, 3, 607, .000												
Age														
Under 20 (Ref.)														
20-24			-1.523	.319	-4.777	.000	-1.358	.317	-4.279	.000	-.970	.302	-3.211	.001
25 +			-2.432	.501	-4.851	.000	-2.123	.503	-4.220	.000	-1.729	.475	-3.639	.000
Gender														
Male (Ref.)														
Female			-.100	.166	-.602	.547	-.021	.164	-.127	.899	-.097	.155	-.630	.529
Block 2: Family/Community	.103	.048, 5.417, 6, 601, .000												
Parents' Education														
PSE (Ref.)														
High school or less							-.567	.222	-2.558	.011	-.385	.210	-1.833	.067
Social support							.091	.043	2.130	.033	.081	.040	2.000	.046
Community size														
0 to 50,000 population (Ref.)														
50,001 to 500,000							.512	.181	2.830	.005	.473	.170	2.775	.006
500,000+							.885	.221	3.998	.000	.768	.209	3.679	.000
Income														
$0 to $60,000 (Ref.)														
$60,001 to $120,000							-.010	.181	-.056	.955	-.032	.170	-.187	.852
$120,001 +							.194	.232	.834	.404	.117	.219	.534	.593
Block 3: Academic	.205	.102, 78.379, 1, 600, 0.000												
High school GPA											.454	.051	8.851	.000

4.4   Discussion/Conclusions

This study sought to examine how personal, family, community, and academic factors were related to the educational expectations of First Nations learners. The study is unique in that it measures educational expectations at a key transition point – applying to PSE – and because it focuses on First Nations learners, who have been largely left out of the expectations literature to date.

Overall, First Nations learners in this study had high expectations for their postsecondary schooling. While Census data has shown that First Nations peoples who attain postsecondary credentials are most likely to have a college certificate or diploma, almost half of First Nations respondents in this study expected to attain an advanced degree, and an additional one-quarter planned to complete an undergraduate degree. The mean number of years of postsecondary schooling expected was 4.6 years.

It is important to emphasize that the focus of this study is on applicants to PSE. The educational expectations of high school graduates who have not applied to PSE, and learners who have not completed high school were not captured. Therefore, the respondents in this study can in many ways all be considered high achievers. While there is no national data on the percentage of First Nations high school graduates who apply to PSE, an Ontario study of students attending secondary school found that 17.5% of Years 4 and 5 First Nations students applied to PSE. The figure for non-Aboriginal students was 46.7% (King et al, 2009). In addition, evidence from the Youth in Transition survey (YITS) suggests that Aboriginal youth are less likely than non-Aboriginal youth to attend PSE (McMullen, 2011). Using YITS data, McMullen (2011) found that at the age of 21, 51.1% of Aboriginal youth were attending PSE compared to 75.4% of non-Aboriginal youth. It should be noted, therefore, that many of the First Nations respondents in this sample would have already overcome significant barriers to be at the point of applying to PSE.

Similar to general studies of expectations (Andres et al, 2007; Butlin, 1999; Museus et al, 2010; Trusty, 2002), academic performance was found to be the strongest predictor of

First Nations applicants' educational expectations. For every five percentage point increase in GPA, educational expectations rose by .38 years. That academic performance had the greatest impact on expectations is an encouraging finding, suggesting that expectations are at least in part based on students' assessment of their own academic skills and effort. If the educational barriers that First Nations learners face had a strong impact on the expectations of respondents, we would expect to see a weak relationship between academic performance and expectations. The relationship is not perfect, however, demonstrating that many other factors are also at play.

Two additional factors found to be significant in this study were parents' educational attainment and social support. First Nations applicants whose parent(s) had completed some level of PSE had higher expectations than those whose parent(s) had not completed PSE. This finding is in line with the Wisconsin status attainment model and other previous studies of aspirations and expectations (Sewell and Shah, 1968; Hanson 1994; Wilson and Wilson 1992; Hossler et al. 1999; Hossler and Stage, 1992; Trusty 2000), as well as the growing body of literature on first-generation students (Terenzini et al, 1996; Lehmann, 2009; Pascarella et al, 2004). Cultural and social capital theories have been particularly useful for understanding the relationship between parents' educational attainment and the aspirations of their children (Qian and Blair, 1999; McCarron and Inkelas, 2006; Wall et al, 1999). These theories suggest that parents with higher educational attainment generally have more of the resources necessary to prepare their children for PSE, such as knowledge of postsecondary options, cultural skills to effectively communicate with teachers, and a positive attitude towards education (Andres et al 2007; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Lareau, 1989). Parents who have attended PSE have also been shown to become more involved in their children's education and to actively nurture high expectations (Wilson and Wilson, 1992). Students who are the first in their family to attend college or university, on the other hand, often experience greater difficulty navigating the PSE landscape, and are thought to be less likely to see PSE as a realistic option (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Qian and Blair, 1999; McCarron and Inkelas, 2006).

The significant finding in relation to social support also lends credence to the relevance of social capital for expectations. Following Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the sum of resources that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of their social network. Social support is theorized to be one resource that individuals access through social networks as part of social capital (Policy Research Initiative Project, 2005), and is generally defined as the availability of people on whom we can rely, and the supportive resources we receive from these people, such as emotional support and positive interaction (Richmond et al, 2012). Although a rather crude measure of social support is used here, First Nations applicants who had utilized a greater number of individuals in making their PSE decisions had higher educational expectations.

Research on Indigenous education using a social capital lens has shown that high levels of social capital are not necessarily related to high levels of educational aspirations or attainment (White et al, 2006). Norm effects are an important consideration. That is, if education is of low value among a person's family and close friends, higher levels of bonding social capital are likely to be associated with lower levels of educational aspirations and attainment (White et al, 2006). While these intricacies cannot be teased out using the data in this study, the distinction is relevant as it could be said that the measure of social support used here takes into consideration both the educational norm effects within the social network, as well as the strength of the social ties. That is, it is likely that respondents who reported having more sources of information about their PSE options have social networks characterized both by higher educational norms and stronger social ties.

The significance of age for First Nations applicants' expectations is not as easily explained by previous expectations research. While a number of studies have examined the stability of aspirations and expectations over time (Alexander et al, 2008; Hanson, 1994; Trusty, 2000), to my knowledge no previous studies have examined the impact of age on expectations at the time of application to PSE and research examining the impact of delaying postsecondary attendance has been mixed. On the one hand, it is argued that taking some time away from studies after high school helps youth to learn about themselves and gain broader life skills (Ahlgren, 2006; Jones, 2004; Pope, 2004), while

others have found that delaying entry to PSE is associated with lower eventual attainment (Bozick and DeLuca, 2005). Proponents of delayed entry, it should be noted, typically focus on delaying entry for only one year.

The findings of this study suggest that delaying entry to PSE does have a slight negative impact on educational expectations for First Nations learners. The bivariate analysis showed that older applicants had significantly lower expectations than those who were under age 20. The multivariate results, however, indicated that much of the relationship between age and educational expectations is mediated by family and community factors, as well as by high school GPA. Once these factors are taken into account, First Nations applicants age 25 or older had only slightly lower expectations than those under age 20, and there was no discernible difference between applicants age 20 to 24 and applicants under 20 years of age. These findings support recent research by Hango (2011), which showed that academic achievement and parental education are important predictors of delayed PSE entry.

That income was significantly related to expectations in the bivariate analysis and when first entered into the regression model, but became insignificant with the addition of high school GPA is also worth noting. This suggests that for First Nations learners, the impact of income on expectations is mediated by academic performance. That is, First Nations learners from higher income families tend to have higher GPAs, which then contribute to higher educational expectations. While not specific to First Nations learners, the relationship between academic performance and income has been well documented in the literature (Davis-Kean, 2005; Smith et al, 1997). Interestingly, this pattern did not hold for the non-Aboriginal population for whom there was no significant relationship between income and expectations even in the bivariate analysis.

The non-Aboriginal comparison group can offer some additional insights. First, age appears to be less salient for First Nations applicants than for non-Aboriginal applicants. That is, older age at time of application has less of a negative impact on the educational plans of First Nations applicants than non-Aboriginal applicants. This is perhaps a positive indication that for First Nations people who decide to attend PSE in their 20s and

beyond, the desire to achieve is strong. These findings are all the more important because First Nations people have been shown to take longer to complete high school on average (BC Ministry of Education, 2011), and are more likely to pursue PSE later in life than the general population (Milligan and Bougie, 2009).

Similar to other recent studies of expectations and aspirations (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002; Krahn and Taylor, 2005; Looker and Thiessen, 2004), expectations were not found to differ by gender for First Nations or non-Aboriginal applicants. While early studies typically found that women had lower expectations and aspirations than men (McClelland, 1990; Astin, 1977; Marini and Grennburger 1978), as women's educational and occupational choices have expanded so too have their expectations. Today, women outnumber men on most university campuses (Parsons and McMullen, 2009), and First Nations women have been shown to have higher levels of PSE attainment than First Nations men (Milligan and Bougie, 2009). In fact, 70% of the First Nations sample in this study was female. This is likely due in part to the higher propensity among women to respond to surveys (Porter, 2004), but also likely reflects a very real gender disparity in who is applying to PSE among First Nations peoples. That expectations were not found to differ by gender should not be interpreted to mean that expectations are gender neutral. As a number of authors have argued (Andres et al, 2007; Kleinjans, 2010; Hanson, 1994; Trusty and Harris, 1999), differences remain in how expectations are formed and in the types of educational pathways and programs that are taken by women and men. Additional research is needed to understand how the formation of educational expectations may differ for First Nations women and men.

With regard to community size, non-Aboriginal applicants from smaller communities had lower educational expectations than those from larger communities even after controlling for other factors. No significant relationship was found between community size and educational expectations among First Nations applicants in the bivariate or multivariate results. The findings for the non-Aboriginal population are in line with previous studies that have demonstrated that urban youth tend to have higher educational expectations than rural youth (Hansen and McIntire, 1989; Looker and Andres, 2001; Looker and Thiessen, 2004). This is thought to be due in part to the geographic location of PSE

institutions, in that access to PSE, particularly at the university level, is limited in smaller communities. Students in rural communities also tend to be exposed to fewer career opportunities, and the careers available in these labour markets tend to require lower levels of education (Haller and Virkler, 1993).

The non-significant finding for the First Nations population suggests that the rural/urban distinction is less important for First Nations learners. However, this is difficult to determine given that the smallest community size category (under 50,000 people) includes both very small and relatively large communities (e.g. this category includes communities with populations of 1,000 people as well as those with populations of 40,000 people). First Nations learners in this study were also more heavily skewed towards smaller communities, with 59.6% of First Nations respondents reporting that they were from communities of less than 50,000 people, compared to 33.6% of the non-Aboriginal sample. While residing on or off reserve is often shown to result in differing educational outcomes, it is not possible to distinguish reserve residents from those residing off-reserve in this sample, though any applicants residing on reserve would fall into the lowest community size category (population of less than 50,000).

Examining the models overall, once individual, family, community, and academic factors are controlled, First Nations and non-Aboriginal applicants to PSE have similar educational expectations. It is also important to note that, as evidenced by the proportion of variance explained, the model was better able to explain the aspirations of non-Aboriginal applicants than First Nations applicants, suggesting that the processes that underlie PSE expectations are different for these two populations.

4.4.1   Limitations

While several valuable findings emerged from this study, the methodological limitations should be noted. First, a few factors thought to influence educational expectations were not available in the dataset. In particular, parental aspirations for their child and parental involvement in their child's education are often considered key determinants but were not measured in the survey (Bozick et al, 2010; Garg et al, 2002; Nichols et al, 2010; Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969). There were also no measures of school or neighbourhood

context, which have been shown to play a role in educational expectations (Lowman and Elliott, 2010; Stewart et al, 2007; Nichols et al, 2010). More importantly, factors thought to be relevant for First Nations learners, such as knowledge of their culture and language, and residing on or off-reserve were also not available in the dataset.

Second, as noted in the methods, a non-representative sample was used which limits the generalizability of the findings. In particular, the descriptive results such as the demographic profile and the overall educational expectations of First Nations applicants need to be understood as descriptions of the sample only as opposed to indicating characteristics of the overall population of First Nations applicants to PSE. Nonetheless, given the recent cancellation of many nationally representative surveys, data from smaller subpopulations such as this are valuable sources of information.[36]

Finally, as with much cross-sectional quantitative work, the causal order of the processes identified in the study are difficult to determine. For example, while a strong relationship between high school GPA and educational expectations was found, it is difficult to determine whether individuals form educational expectations early which then influence academic effort and performance, or whether academic performance shapes educational expectations. In most cases, it is likely that both processes are at play. Longitudinal studies and qualitative research could tease out some of these issues, and help to better understand the multi-faceted nature of students' decision making about educational plans.

4.4.2   Policy Implications

In spite of these limitations, the study findings have a number of important implications for policy. First, as would be expected, high school success is intricately linked to educational expectations. As previously noted, the relationship found between high school GPA and educational expectations is encouraging in that had no relationship been

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[36] Since 2010, the government has announced that it is discontinuing funding for the Youth In Transition Survey (YITS), the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY), the National Apprenticeship Survey (NAS), and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Canadian Federation of Students, 2010). It should be noted, however, that these surveys did not include First Nations peoples living on reserve.

observed it would have indicated that the educational barriers learners face prevent high achieving students from having high expectations for their future attainment. This finding also implies that supporting achievement in high school can be an important mechanism for increasing educational expectations. In fact, the impact of income and community size on educational expectations became non-significant with the addition of GPA. This could reflect a mediating relationship, in that learners from lower income families and rural communities tend to have lower high school GPAs, which is then related to lower educational expectations. However, it also suggests that First Nations learners from low income families and rural communities who experience high school success have educational expectations that are no different from their higher income or urban peers. Resources to support high school success are thus vital to overcoming challenges associated with socioeconomic status.

The importance of focusing on high school in relation to PSE attainment has been well documented in the literature. A number of studies have cited academic under-preparation at the high school level as one of the key obstacles to enrolment and completion of PSE for First Nations peoples (EKOS, 2006; Malatest, 2004; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). First Nations students are often streamed into applied courses in high school (King et al, 2009), and many reserve and remote schools do not offer the academic preparation necessary to enrol and be successful in PSE studies (ACCC, 2010; Holmes, 2005; Malatest, 2002). Research has shown that First Nations students often feel academically underprepared for postsecondary study (Wiebe et al as cited in Malatest, 2002), which can limit what learners feel they can achieve. Ensuring that high schools attended by First Nations students are adequately resourced and are welcoming places for First Nations learners needs to be a top policy priority.

Second, taken together, the significant findings for social support and parental level of education suggest that having role models who are knowledgeable about PSE can significantly increase First Nations learners' educational expectations. Learners who had at least one parent who had attended PSE and those who had greater social support reported higher educational expectations. This was true regardless of high school performance. Recall that the social support variable here was a measure of the number of

individuals a learner spoke to for information about PSE. Therefore, when learners have more people they can turn to for information about PSE, they are likely to have higher expectations.

Being surrounded by individuals who have knowledge of PSE is thought to influence educational expectations by demystifying the PSE process, giving learners confidence to navigate the system (Hossler et al, 1999; Vargas, 2004). While it may not be realistic to implement policies designed to increase the education level of parents and other significant individuals in the lives of youth, community and school based supports can be created to provide learners with the information and role models that can be lacking in their familial and social groups. The use of mentors has been suggested as one way to provide these beneficial relationships for First Nations learners (Malatest, 2002; Klinck et al, 2005; Weinburger, 1999; Human Capital Strategies, 2005). Notions of community, shared responsibility, and mutual respect are central to mentoring. Thus, from an Indigenous perspective, the concept of mentoring has long been a vital component of First Nations cultures (Klinck et al, 2005). The aim of mentoring, in the words of one Native American woman, is to "strengthen the community while awakening the gifts of the young person" (Weinburger, 1999: 3). While mentoring programs have been associated with a number of positive outcomes for youth including more positive attitudes towards school, reduced truancy, modest improvement in academic performance, improved relationships with family and peers, and improved self-confidence (Herrara et al, 2007; Tierney, Baldwin and Resch, 1995; Jekielek et al, 2002; Alberta, 2007), mentoring for First Nations learners interested in pursuing PSE needs to be explored.

Finally, increasing PSE access and attainment will necessitate policy alternatives that enable mature learners to return to schooling. While there has been considerable attention to the unique barriers faced by Indigenous adults in attaining PSE (Holmes, 2005; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; ACCC, 2010) there has been little consideration of their aspirations and expectations. The findings confirm that many First Nations applicants to PSE are mature learners, and show that these mature learners hold high educational expectations. First

Nations respondents age 20-24 and 25 or older in this study planned to complete about four years of PSE schooling on average.

In light of these findings, it is clear that any PSE policy initiative that discriminates based on age will be particularly detrimental for First Nations learners. The 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant is an apt example. The initiative was started in 2012 to help make PSE more affordable by providing a grant equivalent to 30% off of the average tuition cost for college and university students. To be eligible for the grant, however, students must have graduated from high school within the previous four years. In effect, this requirement prevents a large portion of First Nations learners from accessing the funds; learners who are widely acknowledged to need financial support the most.

Overall, one of the ongoing policy challenges is that most postsecondary institutions do not reflect the culture, history, and traditions of First Nations people. Too often, policy responses are framed in such a way that the barriers First Nations learners face are individualized, and learners are seen as having a deficit that can be resolved through programming. Seldom are educational approaches and institutions seen as the source of the problem. Moving forward, policy should be framed such that the goal is to ensure that all educational opportunities are open to First Nations learners, while continuing to work towards Indigenizing educational institutions.[37]

4.4.3   Future Research

Further research is clearly needed to better understand the formation of educational expectations among First Nations learners, as well as the relationship between expectations and eventual attainment. The findings of this study, however, indicate that future research cannot simply adopt pre-existing theoretical frameworks. The theoretical frameworks currently dominating the educational expectations literature have been formulated based on studies that for the most part did not include Indigenous populations. As such, they overlook many potentially important variables.

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[37] See Hill and Redwing Saunders (2008) for a good discussion of Indigenizing education.

From Indigenous scholars, we can glean some of the factors missing from current models of expectations that may be important determinants for First Nations learners. These include bicultural competency, spirit, culture, language, as well as family, community, and institutional factors (Battiste, 2002; Battiste and McLean, 2005; Hill and Redwing Saunders, 2008; Isaac, 2011; Kirkness, 1999). Further research is needed to better understand whether and how these factors are related to educational aspirations and expectations. Educational expectations could also be examined through an intergenerational lens, to understand the ways in which the experiences and attitudes of family members and prior generations impact the current generation. Additionally, the presence of First Nations-controlled postsecondary institutions has been suggested to impact attainment (Mendelson, 2006; King, 2008) and should be explored in relation to expectations as well.

A better understanding of the expectations of mature learners is also needed. As previously noted, prior studies of educational expectations have focused largely on the expectations of elementary and high school students. Alexander et al (2008) argue that as individuals move beyond high school, formative conditions and characteristics become less important in comparison to more immediate experiences. Further, it has been suggested that while youth initially form educational aspirations and expectations based on social norms and parental expectations (Nurmi, 2004), as individuals move from childhood to adolescence expectations begin to be based more on perceptions of their own abilities as well as the structural barriers and opportunities they face (Crowley and Shapiro, 1982). Thus, we might expect that the impact of family variables would diminish with age. While one of the contributions of the present study is the inclusion of learners of various ages, given relatively small sample sizes in older age categories the depth of analysis that could be conducted was limited.

Finally, examining the relationship between First Nations learners' expectations and eventual educational achievement could help to clarify the role of expectations in the attainment process. A central assumption of much of the expectations and aspirations literature is that these are important markers of later success. Perhaps more pressing, better understanding the relationship between expectations and attainment can help

educators and government to develop more effective policies and programs. For example, if there is a large gap between educational plans and attainment it might suggest that learners value education but experience barriers in completing their desired level of schooling. Or, conversely, if expectations and attainment are nearly perfectly correlated, it would suggest that students are being supported in reaching their goals, and that focusing on increasing educational expectations could go a long ways toward increasing attainment. Ultimately, this research could contribute to identifying approaches best able to support educational attainment.

In closing, educational expectations are complex and multi-dimensional. Future research should not try and fit Indigenous learners into mainstream programs, institutions, and life course patterns, but to better understand the choices and aspirations of learners to best support them in their learning journeys.

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Chapter 5

5   Conclusion

Each of these chapters was designed to be a stand-alone study, but together they tell a story. As an integrated whole, the story they tell is of the need for reconceptualising, rethinking, and reimagining in First Nations education. Each of these studies sought to problematize current policies or prominent theories in the education literature. In Chapter 2, the haphazard, uncoordinated nature of federal First Nations early learning and child care (ELCC) policy and programming was highlighted, as was the tendency to base decisions about First Nations ELCC on research conducted with non-Indigenous populations. Chapter 3 challenged the dominant discourse on standardized testing, while also emphasizing the need to reconceptualise assessment approaches in culturally appropriate ways. In Chapter 4, data on the educational expectations of First Nations applicants to postsecondary education (PSE) were utilized to critically examine the applicability of current theories of educational expectations to First Nations learners.

In addition, each of these studies drew attention to challenges faced while also calling attention to the work being done by First Nations families, communities, scholars, and organizations to confront these challenges. With regard to ELCC, it is clear that First Nations face a difficult policy environment characterized by fragmented, inadequate approaches, jurisdictional issues, and a federal government that views ELCC as a private responsibility. Confronting this challenge, the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) is currently conducting the First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (FNREEES) to provide much needed information on the early learning and care experiences and desires of First Nations families that can inform programming and policy development. In K-12 education, First Nations organizations such as the Indigenous Education Coalition are working to reconceptualise assessment approaches in culturally appropriate ways to address the desire of communities to know how their students are faring in relation to criteria defined by the communities themselves. Finally, as seen in Chapter 4, theoretical frameworks currently dominating the educational expectations literature have been formulated based on studies

that for the most part have omitted Indigenous populations. A number of Indigenous scholars, however, have been working to include Indigenous experiences and voices in the literature. In one particularly innovative study, Isaac (2012) used photovoice and the concept of educational vision quests to explore postsecondary transition from the perspectives of First Nations youth.

With regard to the dissertation as a whole, while I stated the importance of personal location in the introduction chapter and located myself personally in relation to the overall work, I did not practice this reflexivity in each of the chapters. At the time I conducted and wrote these three research studies I was not as aware of the importance of this aspect of conducting research with Indigenous populations, and unfortunately did not take field notes during this time. In future work it would be important to not only locate myself at the outset, but to continually engage with this location and reflect on how it impacts the research throughout.

The remainder of this concluding chapter focuses on policy implications and avenues for future research.

5.1   Policy Implications

In Chapter 2 the history of federal policy related to First Nations ELCC was documented, mapping the relationship between the various ways ELCC has been framed and the policy solutions that have been put forward. For example, when ELCC has been framed as a social welfare intervention, it has been limited to families who meet low-income cut-offs. When it has been framed as a mechanism to promote equal opportunity for women, care has been constructed as primarily custodial with little policy attention paid to the quality of care experiences. For First Nations communities, ELCC is a tool to enable parental labour force participation, a mechanism to promote equal opportunity for women, a way to support child development, *and* a means for transmitting culture and language to future generations. It can serve all of these purposes and more. Framing ELCC in relation to only one of these elements impedes the creation of holistic policies and programs.

There is currently a movement towards using economic rationales to make a case for public investment in ELCC (Fairholm, 2009; Fairholm and Davis, 2010; Peters et al, 2010). The general argument is that investing in ELCC for children now will pay large dividends in the future. These articles often include an estimate of the monetary return on every dollar invested in ELCC. While this can appear to be a benign way to garner support for ELCC programming, frames are not merely neutral reflections of reality; they can actively influence how we think about an issue and can shape policy responses. When ELCC is framed as an economic investment, care arrangements that can be shown to have an economic return may be privileged and those that do not may be easily discarded. The danger then becomes that elements that are not easily assigned a dollar value, such as language and culture, are no longer seen as worthy of funding.

Chapter 2 also demonstrated that First Nations ELCC initiatives have typically been an add-on to general ELCC policies. The first national initiative related to First Nations child care (early learning was not yet on the radar) only came about in 1987, and was a small piece of the government's National Child Care Strategy. This was the case again in the 1990s with Canada's Action Plan for Children, and in the 2000s with the Early Childhood Development Agreement and Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. Programming specific to First Nations has been developed, such as Aboriginal Head Start and the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative, but a national strategy specific to Indigenous children has not materialized. While there is currently much attention being paid to First Nations elementary, secondary, and PSE, the early years are largely being left out of the conversation; this despite the widespread recognition that the early years are vital to a child's emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual development. As First Nations organizations have long argued, policies that facilitate a holistic approach to lifelong learning are urgently needed.

In Chapter 3 the use of provincial standardized testing in a First Nations community was explored. While standardized testing is generally used by government to promote accountability and assess the "success" of schools, in First Nations communities the testing can take on a different purpose. The school in this study had reconceptualised the

assessment as a tool to lobby for additional funding and resources, and to inform classroom, division, and school-wide planning.

Using a provincial standardized exam is not the ideal situation, but given that the school did not have the resources or supports necessary to develop and administer a more culturally appropriate test and because the school had been able to use the testing to garner much needed resources, in the current climate it was accruing benefits to the school that would not otherwise have been realized. Nonetheless, concerns about the neo-liberal tendencies of high-stakes standardized testing and the accompanying movement toward marketization need to be taken seriously. Currently in Ontario, First Nations schools can choose whether or not they wish to administer provincial testing and there are no stakes attached for students, teachers, or schools. Under these conditions, the school at the center of this study had been able to accrue many of the benefits of using the testing while asserting agency as a culturally focused school and maintaining Indigenous pedagogies. As the federal government moves towards encouraging First Nations schools to implement provincial assessment systems, vigilance will be needed about the ways in which the test results are used by federal and provincial bodies and the impacts of the testing on the schools.

Chapter 4 examined the determinants of educational expectations among First Nations applicants to PSE, finding that academic performance, parents' educational attainment, social support, and age impact First Nations learners' educational plans. Existing theories of educational expectations have been developed almost exclusively with youth. Yet we know that many people, First Nations and others, pursue education later in life (ACCC and HRSDC, 2008; Milligan and Bougie, 2009). Grounded in Indigenous understandings of learning as a lifelong process, this article problematized the common perception of "student" as age 25 or younger. From a policy perspective, this has important implications. For example, the 30% off Ontario tuition program announced by the Liberal government in December 2011 appeared to be a progressive measure to ease the financial burden of tuition costs for middle and lower income students. One of the eligibility criteria to receive the rebate, however, is that the student must have been out of high school for less than four years. This unfairly disadvantages learners who diverge from the

straight high school to PSE to workforce trajectory. As research has shown, First Nations learners are more likely to fall into this category (ACCC, 2010).[38] Policy makers need to be cognizant of this, and careful not to unnecessarily limit definitions of who qualifies as a "student".

5.2   Future Research

The studies presented here suggest a number of potential avenues for future research. In addition to the future research outlined in each chapter, I wish to highlight a few broader research paths.

1. Each of the research questions addressed within these studies could be examined in a global perspective. How are Indigenous populations in other countries addressing these issues? What promising practices exist? What can be learned?

2. Work is needed to address the gender disparity in education. Currently, the proportion of First Nations men with a university degree is approximately half that of First Nations women, and the proportion with a college diploma or certificate is about two-thirds that of First Nations women (Statistics Canada, 2013). While attainment in the trades is relatively high, a major question facing First Nations education is where are the men and why?

3. There is a critical lack of reliable education data regarding First Nations peoples, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of policies and programs. Research is needed into how to strengthen the data foundation.

4. A key question in past research has been how do we transition and adapt First Nations students to educational institutions to help them succeed. This is slowly shifting, and the question now being asked, and that should be asked more, is how

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[38] For example, according to administrative data from Canadian colleges, 63% of Aboriginal college students are over the age of 25 (ACCC, 2010).

can we change policies and institutions to best meet the needs and interests of Indigenous learners and communities?

In many ways, however, what is needed more than research is action. There is a growing sense that for too long, the same questions have been asked and the same answers have been received.

5.3   Final Thoughts

It is by now well established that Canada has made a great many grave errors in Indigenous education and that these have a negative impact on the educational outcomes of Indigenous learners. Research studies often fall short, however, in offering solutions. While I feel it is important that any solutions must be designed by and with Indigenous peoples and communities, I close with one overarching, simple thought.

As a signatory to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), Canada has a commitment to respect and support the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples as outlined in the declaration (United Nations, 2008). While UNDRIP is an aspirational document and does not have legal force, it is a powerful statement of the common concerns of Indigenous peoples around the world. The articles of the declaration related to education reiterate what Indigenous organizations in Canada have been saying for decades: Indigenous peoples have the right to control their own educational systems, provide education in their own languages and cultures, and to have the dignity and diversity of their cultures respected and reflected in educational institutions. How can Canada realize this commitment in relation to education? As a starting point, the federal government should reconsider the current First Nations Education Act, and begin working seriously with communities to develop policy approaches that are rooted in Indigenous knowledge and recognize learning as a holistic, lifelong process. In the words of Marlene Atleo, "'We are all here to stay' and it is time we got on with collaborating on those new spaces we will create together, these new communities of learning" (Atleo, 2009: 159). The hope is that through collaboration there can be a renewed focus on lifelong learning, a commitment to improving learning

opportunities for all First Nations learners, and the impetus to continue taking meaningful steps towards First Nations control of First Nations education.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Julie Peters
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	Queen's University Kingston, Ontario, Canada 2002-2006 B.A. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2006-2007 M.A. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2007-Present Ph.D.
Honours and Awards:	Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) 2009-2011 Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2009 Graduate Essay Prize in Social Theory University of Western Ontario 2007 Gold Medal in Sociology Queen's University 2006
Related Work Experience	Director of Research Academica Group 2012-Present Senior Policy Analyst Academica Group 2011-2012 Lecturer University of Western Ontario 2012

Managing Editor (Acting)
International Indigenous Policy Journal
2010-2011

Assistant Director
Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium (International)
2009-2011

Research Assistant
University of Western Ontario
2007-2009

Teaching Assistant
University of Western Ontario
2007-2009

Publications:

Sattler, P., and Peters, J. 2013. Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector: The Experience of Ontario Graduates. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

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Community Involvement:

> Board of Directors
> N'Amerind Friendship Centre
> 2009-Present
>
> Aboriginal Education Council
> Fanshawe College
> 2010-2012
>
> Youth Development Committee
> Ministry of Children and Youth Services
> 2011
>
> Council Member
> Faculty of Social Science Council, UWO
> 2009-2010
>
> ThinkCommunity Survey Analyst
> United Way of London and Middlesex
> 2010
>
> Organizer
> UWO Experience Day
> 2010